



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

May 2022

HSOB Expands Website With Historic Eaton Photos

The Historical Society of Bloomfield (HSOB) has updated and expanded its website to include photographs taken in Europe by renowned tonalist painter and longtime Bloomfield resident Charles Warren Eaton (1857-1937). There is even a section titled “Photo-Painting Pairings” that matches an Eaton painting to its original photograph.

Bloomfield Councilman and HSOB Trustee Richard Rockwell painstakingly scanned, organized, researched and created an online home for approximately 1,300 acetate photograph negatives that were donated to the HSOB in 1975 by Priscilla Polkinghorn, whose father was a good friend of Eaton’s. When Eaton died, he left his estate to her, including the negatives, 500 paintings and other property. Charles Warren Eaton is buried in Bloomfield Cemetery.

Eaton often based his landscape paintings on the photographs he took of his travels abroad circa 1900–1925. These negatives survived and the intriguing photographs are now available for viewing at www.charleswarreneaton.org and www.HSOB.org.



The Storm



Mattie E. Hammond

If I could write a poem
About Neptune’s mighty hand
That brushed all those houses
From along the shifting sands—

New Jersey surely had it
People in despair
Looking for what they lost
Can’t find things anywhere.

The mighty waves came rolling in
From ocean wild and wide
The wind so high from the sky
With terror filled the air
People rushed for safety
And slept most anywhere.

Thanks for thoughtful folks
Who used their helping hands
To help the needy ones
In this our precious land.

This poem, written more than 60 years ago on March 6, 1962 by Bloomfield resident Mattie E. Hammond, refers to “The Ash Wednesday Storm of 1962” or “Great March Storm of 1962.” The Level 5 Extreme Nor’easter pummeled the U.S. Mid-Atlantic coast from March 5–9, 1962. It was considered by the U.S. Geological Survey to be one of the most destructive storms ever to affect the Mid-Atlantic states, listed by the Dolan-Davis scale for classification of Atlantic Nor’easters as was one of the 10 worst storms in the U.S. in the 20th Century. It lingered through five high tides over a three-day period, killing 40 people, injuring over 1,000 and causing hundreds of millions in property damage across six states. The storm also deposited significant snowfall over the Southeast.

Learn more about the Bloomfield poet in *The Feather: Poetry by M.E. Hammond*, an annotated collection published in 2020 by her great-grandson, Dr. Burton A. Clark.

Can you Identify?

By Richard Rockwell

This beautiful house was demolished in the late 1940s. For what purpose? Where in Bloomfield are we?



Answers from our members:

John Gibson: That was Washington Street, and the building was demolished to build apartments.
Editor's note: We're sorry, that is not correct.

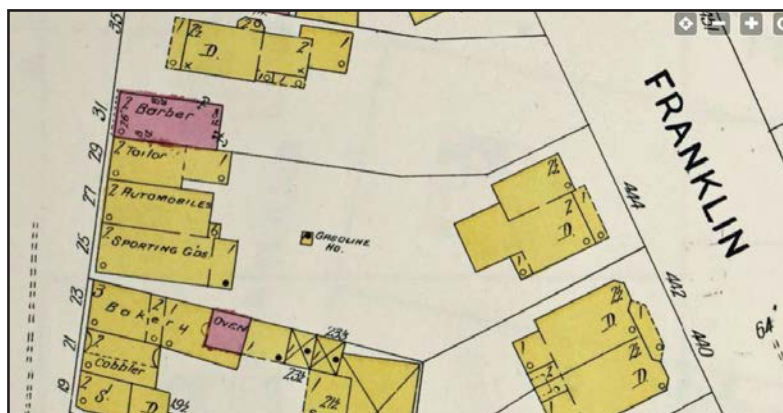
Bruce Anderson: Franklin Street across from Bloomfield College. Right now the empty Mande's building is there. Parking lot on either side. I don't know why the old building was demolished; probably to build the Mande's building.

Editor's note: That's fairly correct!

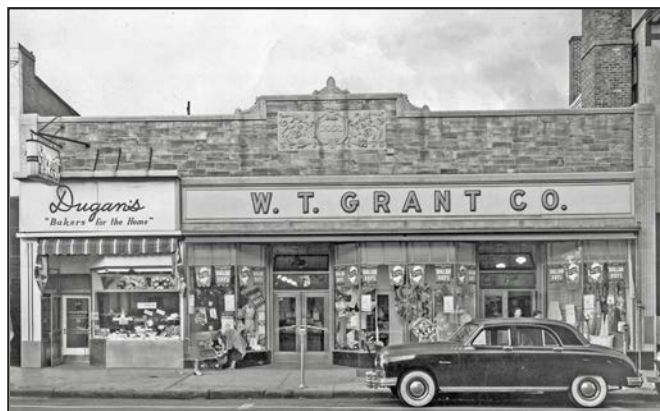
Mary Jones (Director of Bloomfield Cemetery): The house was owned by the Dodd family and located on Franklin Street across from Westminster Hall. The building that replaced it was the home of Grant's five & dime. I loved going there on Saturday as a kid!

Editor's note: Correct! I, too, loved going there as a kid, with that wide staircase that led to the basement level...

This property was **446 Franklin Street**, the home of Horace Dodd. It was demolished in the late 1940s to extend department store W. T. Grant's "through to Franklin Street."

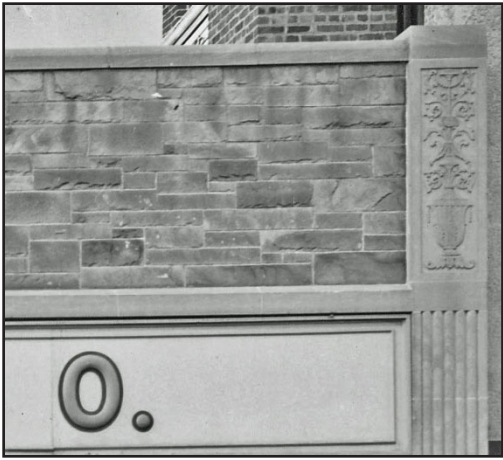


On the 1906 Sanborn map, the Dodd property consisted of the house (numbered 444 Franklin Street on the map) and three buildings on Broad Street— #s 25, 27 and 29.



In 1932, #s 25, 27 and 29 Broad Street were demolished and a new building was erected for the Grant Co. by the Dodd estate under the direction of Howard S. Dodd of Glen Ridge. Grant's opened on Broad Street in 1932.

We are grateful to Jonathan Dodd, great-great-grandson of Horace Dodd, for donating these photos to the Glen Ridge Historical Society. Photos of Grants were by Eugene Biggs.



Some of the original carved stone detail on the columns on either side of the building and at the top of the columns are still visible.

The photo (above, middle), taken in December 2021, shows a piece of the original carved stone peeking out around the aluminum façade.

I'm curious to know if the "Dodd" crest is still there under the aluminum façade that was added to "modernize" the storefront.



Initially, Dugan's Bakery occupied 29 Broad Street, but Grant's expanded right into #29 and extended the W. T. Grant sign across the whole façade of the Dodd building.

When Grant's expanded the store from the rear through to Franklin Street, the remaining Dodd house at 446 Franklin Street was demolished.



In 1950, Grant's held its Grand Re-Opening with the addition through to Franklin Street. The lovely Horace Dodd home was gone forever...

BLOOMFIELD'S SPRAGUE FIELD

A.K.A GENERAL ELECTRIC FIELD: PART 2

By Bill Lamb

At the end of **Part 1**, the Bloomfield Elks were left with a wrecked ballpark when a carelessly discarded cigarette started a fire that caused extensive damage to Sprague Field.

Reconstruction of the burned grandstand and bleacher sections would take at least a month and was prohibitively expensive for a fraternal organization like the Elks to undertake. For the remainder of the 1926 season, an unrepaired Sprague Field lay dormant as the Elks took to playing largely a road game schedule.^{xviii} At year's end, the lodge disbanded its baseball team, bringing the Bloomfield Elks' brief run as a top-flight semi-pro nine to a close.^{xix}

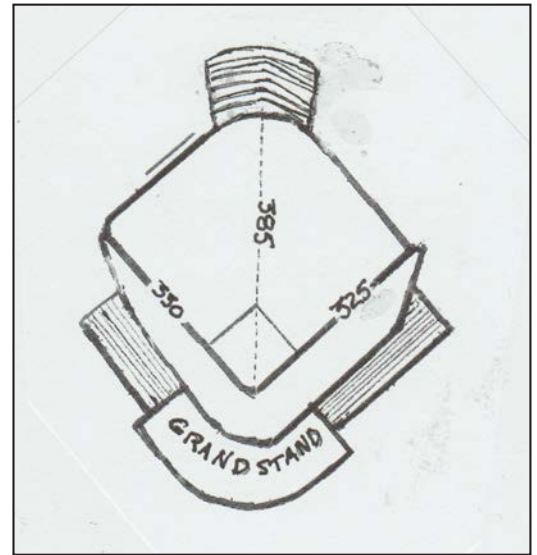
Although the Elks were leaving the competitive baseball scene, Sprague Field was not. Despite the fire damage, the ballpark still had usable seating for about 2,500 spectators, more than sufficient to meet the needs of a fledgling independent Black pro team.

The Newark Browns was formed in 1926, sponsored by the New Jersey Colored Amusement Co. During its maiden season, the Browns played wherever the team could gain access, but for 1927, Browns management wanted to secure a permanent home field. Although located in virtually all-White Bloomfield, Sprague Field was vacant, serviceable and only a short trolley ride from the Black neighborhoods of central Newark where the Browns hoped to draw its fan base from.^{xx} In April, the club assumed the lease for the ballpark.^{xxi} The change in tenants was accompanied by a change in the grounds name—at least in African American newspapers. Because the Sprague Electric Co. plant been subsumed by its corporate parent and now operated under the name of General Electric, the Browns home field would be called General Electric Field in Black press game reportage (although the locals and the Bloomfield press would continue to refer to the ballpark as Sprague Field).^{xxii}

A new club needing to cultivate a following, the Browns had the advantage of home field proximity to Newark's African American population, access to ample area playing talent and a local monopoly on Black professional baseball—the Newark Stars of the Eastern Colored League (ECL) having folded midway in the 1926 season. The Black press was also supportive, with the *Pittsburgh Courier* heralding the Browns Opening Day festivities: “The management is planning a gala opening day on May 4, with appropriate ceremonies attending the throwing out of the first ball, and a record-breaking throng is expected to crowd old Sprague Field to watch their newest favorites do their stuff.”^{xxiii}

Still, the Browns were handicapped by being an independent club, unaffiliated with either the ECL or the Negro National League. While the club was able to get games against elite Black teams like the Hilldale Daisies, Homestead Grays and Brooklyn Royal Giants, Newark was almost invariably the opposition in such contests, submitting to a steady diet of away games against Black baseball's top nines. For home engagements at Sprague/General Electric Field, the Browns customarily hosted lesser, non-major league Black teams and semi-pro White clubs.

The Newark Browns remained tenants of Sprague Field for the remainder of the decade and through the 1931 season. Over that time, the club's perseverance, plus the Depression-driven collapse of the ECL, persuaded Hilldale, the Baltimore Black Sox, Pittsburgh Crawfords and other top Black clubs to begin paying visits to the Browns' home field. Such contests often filled the reduced seating of the grounds to capacity: “... the 2,500 fans that rammed and crammed their way into General Electric Field” were delighted by the Browns 9–0 whitewash of Hilldale on Aug. 1, 1931,^{xxiv} while “the largest crowd that ever packed the stands of General Electric Field” had seen Newark drop a doubleheader to the Baltimore Black Sox two days earlier.^{xxv} The Browns finished a generally successful 1931 season



Sprague Field, aka General Electric Field
Constructed: April 1919
Demolished: Circa 1940

by winning a 5-game set against the touring San Juan (Puerto Rico) Stars and then playing a 7-game series against the Newark Independents (a White team) for the Newark city championship.^{xxvi}

In early 1932, the Newark Browns took a big step up in stature, gaining admission to the East-West League (EWL), a newly-formed Negro Leagues major formed by Homestead Grays club boss (and Pittsburgh numbers honcho) Cum Posey.^{xxvii} An ambitious 132-game split-season schedule was adopted at the circuit's organizational meeting and widely published in the Black press.^{xxviii} Thereafter, a respectable roster was put together by Browns player-manager John Beckwith, a formidable batsman and reputedly the first player to drive a ball over the center field fence at Redland Field.^{xxix}

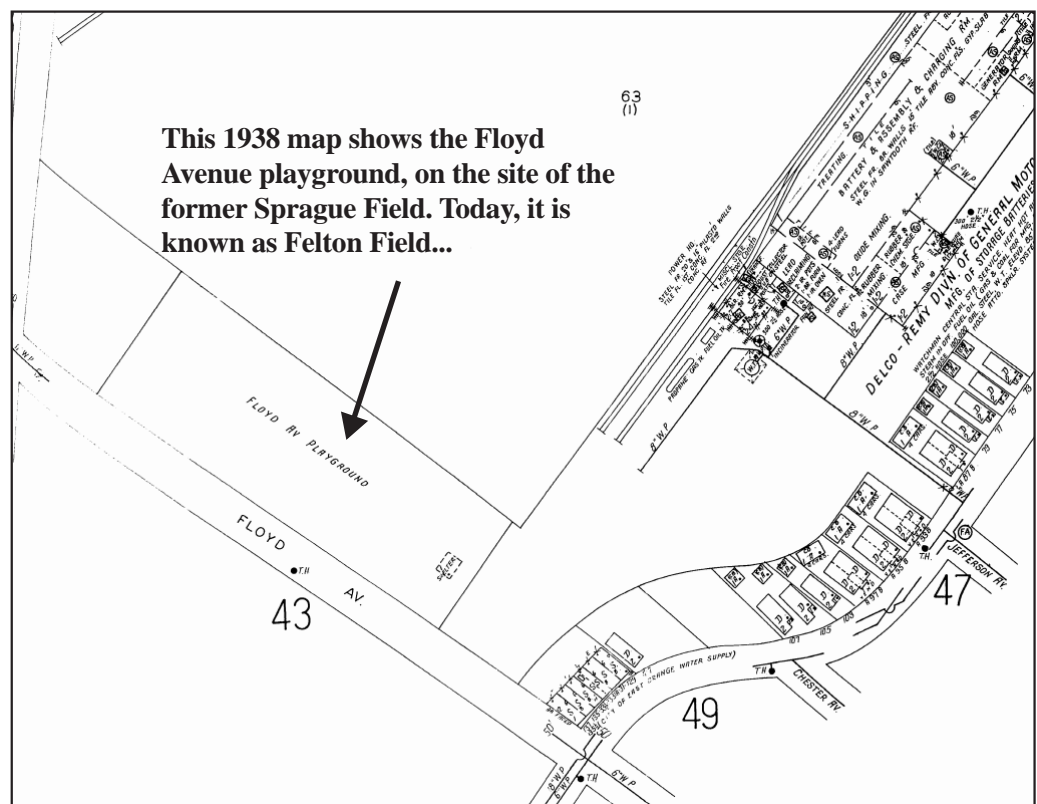
The Browns opened with a May 1 exhibition game win over the Pennsylvania Red Caps at General Electric Field, but once the regular season started, Newark was snake-bitten. Beginning on the road, the Browns dropped their first four games, committing a staggering 28 fielding errors in the process.^{xxx} Once the club got home, incessant rain caused the postponement of their home opener for days. Indeed, the league as a whole was plagued by bad weather throughout the Spring, causing the cancellation of a significant number of EWL games. By mid-June, the Newark Browns had managed to play fewer than half of the 35 games scheduled, and when they did play, the Browns were lousy, posting a 3-14 (.178) record that left the club solidly in last place. More ominously, Newark also had serious money problems. "With the Newark Browns, things have been going very badly," reported the Pittsburgh Courier, "and because of financial trouble it is doubtful if they will be able to continue."^{xxxi} If Newark folded, plans were laid for the Pittsburgh Crawfords to assume the Browns' place in the league or for the EWL to drop another team in the schedule at the July 4 mid-point break and then proceed as a six-club circuit.^{xxxii}

These schemes were overtaken by financial realities and the entire EWL dissolved. The Newark Browns, however, did not discontinue play. Rather, the club soldiered on as an independent nine that barnstormed the East Coast.^{xxxiii} However, once the summer of 1932 ended, the Browns' time as a professional baseball club was over.

Sprague Field's brief tour of duty as a Negro League venue, however, was sufficient to earn it an entry in the ballpark compendium *Green Cathedrals*.^{xxxiv}

The Newark Browns were the last regular tenant of Sprague Field. Once they disbanded, the ballpark was reduced to hosting the odd game of local amateur and semi-pro nines. In 1934, the grounds also served as home field for four games of the Newark Dodgers of the newly-formed Negro National League II, but only as a backup facility, as the Dodgers, and succeeding Negro League clubs like the Newark Eagles, preferred the newer and far-more-commodious Rupert Stadium that also had the advantage of being located in Newark proper. By 1933, however, the Bloomfield Recreation Commission had begun using the Sprague Field grounds as a Monday-through-Friday summer recreation facility dubbed the Floyd Avenue playground.^{xxxv}

Subsequent Sprague Field-related events are shrouded by scant press coverage,^{xxxvi} sketchy documentary evidence and the passage of time. In August 1928, the Town of Bloomfield acquired title to a good portion of





General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
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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 several 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.

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:

Donald Beach Barrett
Mills River, NC

Judy Hannah
South Plainfield, NJ

Robert Andres
& Gretchen McGowan
Bloomfield

James Knarr
Weatherford, TX

BLOOMFIELD'S SPRAGUE FIELD, CONTINUED

the property on which Sprague Field sat.^{xxxvii} The town operated a summer recreation program on the site from that date forward, but in all probability, the field's fencing, grandstand and bleachers were gone by 1940, as town elders were likely ill-disposed toward absorbing the costs of maintaining a little-used wooden ballpark exposed to the elements. Today, the site of long-gone Sprague Field continues to provide the grounds of a Bloomfield playground that fosters the aspirations of the community's youngest ballplayers, and that is not a bad legacy.

Source Notes & End Notes can be found on page 7.

Bill Lamb is a Bloomfield native and played ball on the Sprague Field site in his youth. Now retired, he lives in Meredith, NH and serves as editor of The Inside Game, the newsletter of SABR's Deadball Era Committee.

SOURCES

The primary sources for the narrative above are contemporaneous reportage in *The (Bloomfield, NJ) Independent Press* and *Pittsburgh Courier*, and Sam C. Pierson, *Thumbing the Pages of Baseball History in Bloomfield* (Bloomfield, NJ: The Independent Press, 1939). Unless otherwise noted, information pertaining to Negro Leagues baseball has been taken from *The Negro Leagues Book*, Dick Clark and Larry Lester, eds. (Cleveland: SABR, 1994).

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Sprague Field profiled herein is not to be confused with the later-built Sprague Field that serves as home grounds for Montclair (NJ) University athletic teams.
- 2 Named for electrical engineer-inventor Frank J. Sprague (1857-1934), Sprague Electric Company designed and manufactured railway switches and other apparatus crucial to the development of urban mass transit, and had been a presence in Bloomfield since 1884. Later, the plant segued into the production of radio components and other electrical devices. Acquired by General Electric in 1902, the company retained the name Sprague Electric into the 1920s.
- 3 As per "Sprague Electric Base Ball Team," *The (Bloomfield, NJ) Independent Press*, April 4, 1919. The cost of fixing up the diamond was subsequently estimated at \$2,000.
- 4 Per Philip J. Lowry, *Green Cathedrals: The Ultimate Celebration of Major League and Negro League Ballparks* (New York: Walker & Company, 2d ed., 2006), 21. The smallish Sprague Field dimensions were the rough equivalent of other contemporary ballparks, including Redland (later Crosley) Field – LF: 328; CF: 387; RF: 366 in 1938. Or today, Oriole Park at Camden Yards – LF: 333; CF: 400; RF: 318.
- 5 See "Sprague Works Field Day Was a Great Success," *The Independent Press*, September 17, 1920.
- 6 Per "Sprague Team Opens Baseball Season Here," *The Independent Press*, May 1, 1919.
- 7 According to Sam C. Pierson, *Thumbing the Pages of Baseball History in Bloomfield* (Bloomfield, New Jersey: The Independent Press, 1939), 78. For decades, Pierson was the hometown weekly's sports reporter.
- 8 Per "Bloomfield Was Stronghold of Baseball in Early Days," *The Independent Press*, April 12, 1954. See also, Pierson, 70.
- 9 *Ibid.* See also, Pierson, 71.
- 10 Ferguson posted a 61-85 (.418) record in a 10-season major league career that ended in 1929.
- 11 Per *The Independent Press*, April 12, 1954.
- 12 Per Pierson, 74-75. The 1954 retrospective cited in endnote 8 placed the Bloomfield Elks club record for the 1921-1926 seasons at an even better 124-53 (.701).
- 13 See "Newark School Board To Oust Bears from Oval," *Jersey (Jersey City) Journal*, June 6, 1924.
- 14 Newark Evening News editorial re-printed in *The Independent Press*, March 26, 1926.
- 15 "Newark Bears to Play on Sprague Field," *The Independent Press*, March 26, 1926, and Edward H. Foegel, "Newark Fans Go Limit to Get Their Baseball," *The Sporting News*, April 8, 1926.
- 16 See "9,000 See Bears Beat Phillies, 9-7," *New York Times*, April 11, 1926.
- 17 Per Howard Freedman, "Evening Muse," *Newark Evening News*, April 15, 1926.
- 18 After the fire, the Elks occasionally used Sprague Field for matches against non-draws like the Newark Hebrew Club. See "Hebrew Club Finds Antlers Easy," (Newark) *Jewish Chronicle*, June 4, 1926.
- 19 As recollected in *The Independent Press*, April 12, 1954. See also, Pierson, 74-75.
- 20 As elsewhere in the North, 1920s New Jersey was an apartheid-like state, with few racially-mixed neighborhoods. Bloomfield and the adjoining neighborhoods of East Orange and north ward Newark had hardly any black residents, but Sprague Field was within short walking distance of a stop of a Bloomfield Avenue trolley line that originated in the African American precincts of downtown Newark.
- 21 Per "NJ Browns To Be Classy," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 1927.
- 22 Contemporary Negro Leagues websites like *Seamheads.com* list the home grounds of the 1932 Newark Browns (and 1934 Newark Dodgers) as General Electric Field. That name, however, never gained much local traction. To Bloomfield natives, the name of the ballpark was always Sprague Field.
- 23 *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 19, 1927.
- 24 Per "Newark Defeats Hilldale," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 15, 1931.
- 25 See "Black Sox Top Newark in Twin Bill," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 1, 1931.
- 26 As per the *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 3, 1931. The Browns won the series against the San Juan Stars. The outcome of the Newark city championship was undiscovered by the writer.
- 27 The other clubs admitted to the EWL were the Homestead Grays, Hilldale (Philadelphia) Giants, Baltimore Black Sox, (New York) Cuban Stars East, Detroit Wolves, Cleveland Hornets, and Washington Pilots.
- 28 See e.g., *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 30, 1932, and (Los Angeles) *California Eagle*, May 6, 1932.
- 29 According to sports columnist Louis E. Dial in the *New York Age*, March 12, 1932.
- 30 Sportswriter W. Rollo Wilson found such fielding ineptitude "almost impossible" to comprehend. *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 28, 1932.
- 31 Per "May Cut to 6 Clubs," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 25, 1932.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Per "Forgotten Heroes: John Beckwith," Dr. Leyton Revel and Luis Munoz, Center for Negro League Baseball Research, 2014, 14.
- 34 See endnote 4 for full title and publication data.
- 35 The first discovered report of activity at the Floyd Avenue playground appeared in "Bloomfield Playgrounds Now at Height of Summer Activity," *The Independent Press*, July 21, 1933.
- 36 The last discovered press mention of Sprague Field states that the site of the former ballpark was acquired by Westinghouse for conversion into an employee parking lot. See "Town Parking," *The Independent Press*, August 8, 1957. But the article's unidentified author misapprehended where Sprague Field was located (some distance to the south of the Westinghouse parking lot), and by 1957, the old Sprague Field grounds had long been converted into a neighborhood playground then called Floyd Field.
- 37 Per Deed dated August 10, 1928. Forty years later, Bloomfield acquired formal title to the remainder of the property. Many thanks to Andrea Schneider, confidential assistant to the Bloomfield Town Administrator, for supplying copies of the now-Felton Field property deeds.