



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield

Celebrating Bloomfield's Bicentennial: 1812-2012



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

OCTOBER 2012

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, October 23, 2012

**THE VAN FOSSAN THEATER,
BLOOMFIELD COLLEGE**

449 Franklin Street
(Franklin & Fremont)
8:00 PM

*“Dear Friend: Historical Reminiscences
from Old Glen Ridge”*

~A Dramatic Reading by the Gas Lamp Players~



Back in the second half of the 19th-century, talk of secession filled the air, but it had nothing to do with the Confederacy or the Civil War. It was Glen Ridge's desire to secede from Bloomfield, which ultimately happened in 1895. "Dear Friend" is a staged dramatic reading of letters and diaries written by Bloomfield and Glen Ridge residents between 1860 and 1895, when secession was on everyone's mind. The material was adapted for the stage and directed by Jessica Sporn in conjunction with the Glen Ridge Historical Society.

FUTURE MORRIS CANAL HIKES PLANNED

The Morris Canal hike is scheduled again for Nov. 3; however, it's fully booked. If you would like to get on a list to be notified of future hikes, email: morriscanal@gmail.com. If there is enough interest, there will be another hike in the Spring.

TIME MARCHES ON



Pictured in the Museum with the Tiffany clock are (L to R) Gwendolyn Schenck, Provident Bank's Assistant VP & Compliance Supervisor; Dorothy Johnson, Museum Curator; HSOB Volunteer Anne Carlino; and Michael Kahn, Provident VP & Area Manager. Photo courtesy of Provident Bank & The Bloomfield Patch.

Members of the HSOB met recently with Provident Bank officials to receive pieces of Bloomfield history that the bank bequeathed to the town. Some items date back to the 100th anniversary of Bloomfield Savings Bank in 1971, including a 40+ year old Tiffany clock. Other donated memorabilia include ledger books from Bloomfield Savings dating back to the 1950s, advertisements, newspaper clippings on new hires and employee promotions and programs from charity events.—
By Jessica Wolf, The Bloomfield Patch

Hot Day for Morris Canal Hikers



Pictured: At left, hikers pause to compare historical photos to the current location where an aqueduct carried the Morris Canal over Third River, just south of the James Street Bridge. Photo by Ron Rice. At right, the Aqueduct over Third River and James Street, circa 1910. Photograph by Charles Warren Eaton, Priscilla Douglas Polkinghorn Collection, HSOB.

On Saturday, July 7, 2012, 23 hikers braved 97° heat to explore the path of the Morris Canal through Bloomfield. The hike was sponsored by the Bloomfield Bicentennial Committee and the Historical Society of Bloomfield (HSOB). Tour leaders were HSOB Trustee Rich Rockwell of Bloomfield and Ron Rice of Cedar Grove, Map Archivist for the Canal Society of NJ. Due to the extreme heat, the hike was modified so sections of the trip were on an air conditioned bus provided by the Bloomfield Recreation Dept.

The urban archeological tour began at Wrights Field, where the filled-in Canal is now a recreational path, then to the soon-to-be-demolished Berkeley Ave. Bridge. The tour proceeded to the location of the aqueduct over Second River, then north to the site of Lock 15 East on Montgomery St., continued north on JFK Drive passing the location of coal yards and industries along the Canal. Other locations included the sites of most of Bloomfield's 14 Canal bridges, the aqueduct over Third River near the James St. Bridge, the inclined plane, the Collins House (one of the oldest remaining houses in Bloomfield next to the inclined plane) and the two sections of the Canal in the northern part of Bloomfield that remain intact. — *By Rich Rockwell*

REMEMBERING THE DIRT CLUB

The Dirt Club, located in the basement and ground floors of 10 Orange Street (corner of Myrtle Street, behind the Eskimo Pie packing plant) from 1979–1991, was an alternative musical and cultural institution. It was housed in a three-story, gothic structure painted to resemble a medieval castle with partially demolished brick wall, a mere stone's throw from Exit #148 on the Garden State Parkway.

The club had originally been Delmar's Lounge, a neighborhood, blue collar go-go bar. Despite economic challenges brought on by the demise of the alternative music scene in New Jersey, corporate consolidation of FM radio, market research driven music programming, harassment and opposition from local municipal authorities, The Dirt Club was very successful.

It was about as far away from the stereotypical image of New Jersey Rock & Roll, (ie. Bruce Springsteen, Asbury Park) as one could imagine. Booking between 10 and 25 local, regional and national acts in a five-night week (almost ten thousand sets in a decade), The Dirt was known for its eclectic and radical mix of punk, new wave, rockabilly, hardcore, reg-



Inside The Dirt Club

gae, art rock, performance art, power pop, blues rock and the occasional classical chamber performance. Nowhere else were these divergent musical styles and influences seen in one club, much less on the same night. The Smithereens, who later went on to national fame and fortune, were for a while the Thursday house band at The Dirt Club.

At the helm was owner and former carnival barker Johnny Dirt (John Schroeder), who lived with his family on the 2nd and 3rd floors of The Dirt Club. By day they ran the Dirt Empire: The Dirt Club, Dirt Records (an independent record label that produced, recorded and released several compilation albums of Dirt bands) and a t-shirt and poster printing operation. Schroeder was born in Newark, NJ in 1945 and grew up in the Forest Hill neighborhood of Newark's North Ward. Schroeder himself was one of the main attractions at The Dirt Club—outgoing and fast-talking, but above all a music lover, he was passionately committed to building a music scene in Essex County.



Johnny Dirt, aka John Schroeder

"I'm not a punk club," Schroeder told *Jersey Beat* magazine in 1982. "I'm an original rock 'n' roll club. New Jersey needs some good bands, and I'm the one who's going to provide them."

Schroeder's Dirt Club was often compared to Greenwich Village's CBGB music club, but never had the international reputation that CBGB enjoyed. However, like its cousin across the Hudson, it was known for its inventive, creative programming, its willingness to give oddball bands a shot, and its grungy but comfortable, welcoming interior that had few of the pretensions then associated with alternative music venues.

The Dirt Club didn't stay open long enough to participate in the alternative rock movement of the mid-1990s, but its role in the resurgence of the Garden State underground was acknowledged at the recent *Jersey Rocks* exhibition at the Morris Museum.

The beloved Bloomfield music hall is no longer standing and Johnny Dirt died of prostate cancer at his Mount Holly, NC home on Aug. 24, 2011 at the age of 66.

"I never made any money in The Dirt Club," Schroeder told *The Star-Ledger* in 2001. "My motivation was I became part of something. And that overtook everything else I was doing."



Looking like a haunted roadhouse, The Dirt Club stood on the corner of Myrtle and Orange streets from 1979-1991

CAN YOU IDENTIFY?

In our Oct. 2011 issue, we asked readers to identify these existing Bloomfield houses from way back in the 20th Century. Could you do it? The houses are on 35 Benson St. and 56 Benson St., respectively.

Below, the school in the background of #35 is Brookside School on Essex Ave.



Below, the level plane behind #56 is the abandoned Erie Railroad, formerly Greenwood Lake & Montclair Railroad.





General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER
THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER
OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF BLOOMFIELD

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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 to see you at our next meeting:

- Gregory Babula, *Bloomfield*
- Mr. & Mrs. William & Heather Carr, *Bloomfield*
- Ralph G. & Ann M. Conte, *Hamberg, NJ*

- Louise R. Davies, *Bloomfield*
- John & Cindi Debold, *Bloomfield*
- Florence P. DeNoia, *Bloomfield*
- Linda A. Seville, *Bloomfield*
- Jack Stadtlander & Meghan Murray, *Bloomfield*
- Nora Wertz & Liam MacNiallais, *Bloomfield*
- Barbara Wolinsky & Edward Davis, *Bloomfield*

HOW TO JOIN THE HSOB

The Historical Society welcomes anyone with an interest in local history who wants to learn more. To join, download a membership application at www.hsob.org, call 973-743-8844 or email info@hsob.org (membership also makes a great gift!)

Additionally, anyone above the legal voting age who wants to contribute a manuscript is more than welcome. Send manuscripts or story ideas to: info@hsob.org or mail to HSOB Museum, c/o Bloomfield Public Library, 90 Broad St., Bloomfield, NJ 07003. Please mark submissions Attention Editor.

BLOOMFIELD BRAIN BUSTER

Solve this cryptogram by filling in the missing letters. The answer reveals a fun fact about our town. The solution will appear in the March 2013 issue of *The New Town Crier*. If you want to verify before then, send your puzzle solution to HSOB1812@gmail.com. If you get it right, we'll print your name!

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