



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

MAY 2007

MEETING

TUESDAY, MAY 22 – 8:00 PM
at the
OAKESIDE BLOOMFIELD
CULTURAL CENTER
240 Belleville Avenue, Bloomfield

Historical Society of Bloomfield Hosts Student Government Association

Ms. Celia Ltricchia and Mr. Al Mousab, Bloomfield High School teachers and sponsors of the High School Student Government Association, with S. G. A. members, will describe their trip and experiences to and in New Orleans. They were accompanied by six chaperones, Mr. Moussab and Ms. Laricchia. Forty enthusiastic students showed up to volunteer and after interviews and written essays, twenty were accepted. Planning began in October, '06. They would spend their spring break in February '07 gutting Katrina damaged homes in New Orleans. Though they would be gone 9-10 days, the students would miss only two days of classes.

To raise money for airfares and food, many activities were undertaken, even putting on a rock show last December at the Bloomfield Avenue café in Montclair. Housing was provided by a New Orleans church. They slept on cots and air mattresses. Tulane University provided showers.

On one occasion, local residents tried to move into the C. J. Peete Housing Project. All were stopped, including the Bloomfielders who tried to help the residents. The New Orleans Housing Police told residents and the High School students that the C. J. Peete Housing Project was to be torn down.

Mr. Moussab, Ms. Laricchia and the S. G. A. are making plans to return in 2008.

One of the invaluable outcomes from this complicated project was to make students aware of "issues out there", Ms. Laricchia said.

The general public as well as Historical Society members are invited to attend, to hear what our school volunteers have to tell us and to answer questions from the audience. Refreshments will be served. Parking is available.



Walter Johnson, Jr. sits proudly in one of the three busses he and his brother, Bob, operated between Bloomfield and Newark. The slippery rattan seats, duck board floors, and open-window "air-conditioning" were standard equipment on the public transportation of the time. The bars on the windows were a safety feature designed to prevent curious sightseers from losing their heads through contact with a passing vehicle.

The Johnsons of Bloomfield

By Joseph Barry, Jr.

Walter J. Johnson was born in Leeds, England on May 22, 1872. His father died in 1879 when he was seven years old and his mother sailed to Canada with him and his younger brother Joseph the same year. In 1881 she moved to New York City with her two boys. They grew up there.

In 1897, Walter met Delia Meehan from County Galway, Ireland. They were married in February of 1898. He was a furniture finisher and worked for the Steinway Piano Company in Queens, N.Y. and they lived in Brooklyn.

They soon had little ones; Robert in November 1898, Walter in May 1900, James in November 1902 and Mary Ellen in 1904. Delia yearned for a home in the country.

Walter got a job with the newly formed Lauter Piano Company in Newark and they moved to Jerome Place in Bloomfield in 1905. In 1906 they bought a newly constructed house at 453 East Passaic Ave. on the south corner of Watchung Place. That section of East Passaic Ave. became Sadler Road around 1941 and the address was 123 Sadler. It was a large lot, extending up Watchung Place to the east boundary of what is now number 15 Watchung Place.

The commute to downtown Newark would be considered tough today. Walter worked six ten-hour days. He walked down Center St. Nutley to the end of the trolley line on Washington Ave. on the Nutley-Belleville border, then took the trolley to downtown Newark. Not too bad in the spring and fall, but tough in the heat of summer and the cold wind and snow of winter. But Delia was happy and his boys loved the country life. She had her garden and chickens, fruit trees and grape vines and flowers.

Brookdale at that time was farms, woods and swamps. Horse and wagon and walking were how they got around to Sacred Heart Church and School and Brookdale School and shopping. There was no public transport in Brookdale. They did use the Morris Canal too.

Bob and young Walt became very competent hunters and trappers. The swamps and the canal were alive with muskrats. Their pelts were a source of cash that they took advantage of.

The family continued to grow. Margaret was born in 1909, Joseph in 1912 and Charles in 1918. They put an addition on the house in 1911, adding two bedrooms and a large dining room. Bob and Walt both worked on the addition, gaining knowledge of the building trades.

Bob finished eighth grade and went to work at the piano factory. Walt also left school after the eighth grade and worked on construction sites in Bloomfield and Nutley. They both continued to run a large trap line for muskrats. Bob and a friend went into trapping full time and camped out in tents through two winters in the Lincoln Park vicinity and serviced their

The Johnsons (continued from page 1)

A family portrait of Walter and Delia Johnson with sons, Walter and Robert, circa 1901.

traps along the canal and the Passaic and Pompton rivers.

Bob served in the army in 1918. Walt studied building construction with correspondence courses. He also worked as a clerk for an oil company in Newark and as salesman for food distributor. Both Bob and Walt saved their money.

In early 1921, they noted that the growing population in Brookdale needed bus transportation and they decided to provide it. They purchased a bus and started a bus line that ran from Alexander Ave. near the Clifton border, along Broad St. to Bloomfield Center, then down Franklin St. to Belmont Ave. Belleville, then along Belmont Ave. to Bloomfield Ave., then down Bloomfield Ave. to Broadway and Broad St. Newark, then down Broad St. Newark to Lincoln Park, Newark. The venture was a success. They bought two more buses and ran the line for three years. They sold the buses and business to Public Service Coordinated Transport in March of 1924, which ran it as the #30 line.

They then decided to build houses. They subdivided two lots on Watchung Place from their father's lot and built two two family houses at #11 and #15 Watchung

Place, completing them in 1926. Walter then formed Walter Johnson Homes and purchased property on East Passaic Ave, just south of Day St. and built four more one family homes in 1926. Bob went into sales and formed Johnson Realty Company at Broad and Watchung Ave.

Walter built Day St., Chestnut Terr., Byrd Ave., Byrd Pl., Barnes Pl. and several homes on West Passaic Ave. Then he built Parkview Drive, Mountain Ave., Overlook Terr., Haines Drive and Highfield Road. He continued building right through the depression until material shortages stopped him during World War II. His last large project was East Passaic Ave. and Sadler Road from Pilch St. to Watchung Ave, which he started in 1940 and completed in early 1943.

Walt worked in sales at Johnson Realty Co. from 1943 to 1946 when he started building again on Sadler Road, then Broughton Ave., then upper Broad St and Alexander Ave. In the 1950's he began building in Upper Montclair where he built many homes. He opened a real estate office in Upper Montclair in the late 1950's and retired from building. He was married to Barbara Mencik of Bloomfield and had three sons.

Bob was very successful in the real estate and insurance business. He retired to a farm in Pennsylvania in 1963. His son Bill continued the business until his death in 1988. Bob was married to Ruth Florus of Bloomfield and had three sons.

James Johnson finished high school and went to work for the telephone company. He worked there for forty-five years. He was District Maintenance Manager when he retired.

He was married to Marie Barry of Bloomfield and had three sons.

Mary Ellen cared for her mother Delia who was crippled by arthritis. She never married and lived in Bloomfield all her life.

Margaret married Joseph Barry of Bloomfield and had five children. She worked at Johnson Realty Co. and later for the Township of Bloomfield in the welfare department. She too lived in Bloomfield her entire life.

Joseph learned the electrical trade and worked for Walter Johnson Homes He married and had three children. They lived in the old house on 123 Sadler Road which had been converted to a two family. He served in



Walter Jr. and Robert on their First Communion Day, circa 1910.

the army during World War II. He moved to Mountain View after the war and eventually retired to Scranton PA.

Charles joined the navy when he graduated from high school He served on the USS Houston. He was discharged in 1941. He joined the army after Pearl Harbor and was a paratrooper in the Pacific. He fought in New Guinea and the Philippines, participating in the liberation of Corregidor in 1945. After the war he moved to California and worked in the logging business. He never married. He retired to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico.



The horse barn (now demolished) at the front of 123 Sadler Road was the home of Bob and Walt's busses.



This crate held a dozen bottles of Scott's Emulsion.

New Museum Accessions

A recent gift from Ed Stekowicz to the Historical Society Museum is this interesting relic of the days (not so long ago) when Bloomfield was called "The Town of Industry". One of the smaller businesses was at 60 Orange Street just West of the Schering Corporation complex. Scott and Bowne had been at that address since 1910, manufacturing a dietary supplement made from Cod Liver Oil, a distasteful dose of which was believed to be a source of Vitamin C and a natural way to ward off colds in the 19th and 20th centuries.

By 1960, Scott and Bowne had moved elsewhere, (taking their bronze cod fisherman statue with them), and their former five story concrete building was bought for use as office space by Schering, which has since relocated out of town. Both structures are now demolished and their sites occupied by a new building.

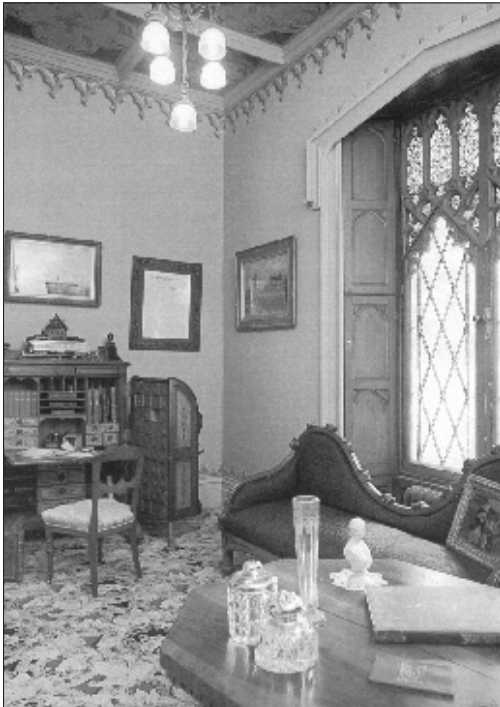


The home of Scott's Emulsion, published in the December 1, 1918 issue of the Independent Press.



WOOTEN PATENT DESK

The reason for this drawing is probably the center feature: a Wooten Patent Desk. They were produced in small numbers from 1874 until 1880 and are now considered a collector's prize. Wooten desks were tremendously expensive (possibly the 19th equivalent of an imported sports car today) and owned only by very wealthy men. That Miss Ward owned such a piece of furniture suggests that she had a masculine outlook and that her family had considerable wealth



A Wooten Desk was the prized possession of Wall Street financier Jay Gould. His desk had a prominent place in the study of his Gothic Revival summer home overlooking the Hudson River at Tarrytown, New York.

Bloomfield's "Bloomer Girl"

Except from a letter from Almeda Hanks Ward to her daughter, Lydia Anna dated September 25, 1864, which contains advice on good taste and a warning:

The bloomer costume, your father has a peculiar dislike to for young ladies..."



The sensation caused by Amelia Jenks Bloomer has been pretty much forgotten. The lady's startling innovations in women's clothing seem not to have reached this sleepy hum-drum town: if it had, the newspapers would certainly have taken note of its appearance. That it was not easy to overlook as proved by the attached illustration of the so-called "Bloomer" costume, taken from a 19th century engraving. As we know from the above excerpt from Almeda Ward to her daughter at college in Vermont, Mrs. Ward wanted Anna to spare her father's feelings at accompanying his daughter to the Old

First Presbyterian Church if she dressed like a circus clown. Even today, with clothing at its present deplorable state, it might cause a raised eyebrow or two at that conservative institution.

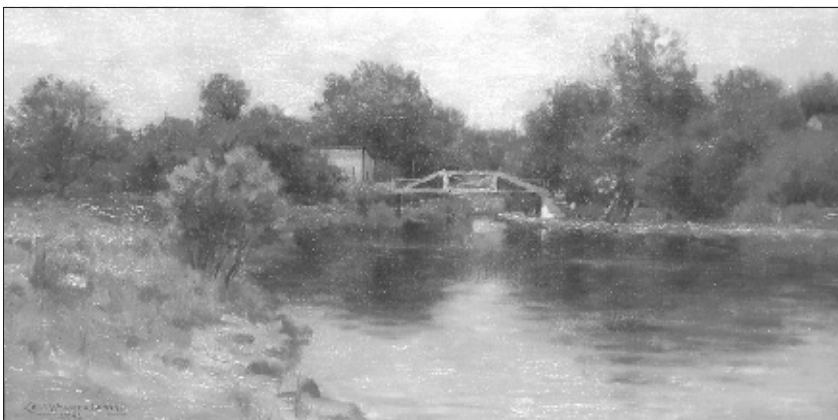


In defense of Mrs. Bloomer, it is a known fact that the excessively tight corsets of the era were responsible for many illnesses caused by the cramping of internal organs in a desperate attempt at least try to achieve the fashionable 21-inch waistline. The Ward social status was exalted enough for Lydia to get away with it, but it is good to be able to report that she respected her father's "peculiar dislike".



The residence of Israel Currie Ward as it appeared when originally built around 1840. It still stands on Park Place, although moved closer to the street and set on a lower foundation. Anna Lydia was born here in 1845.

THE MORRIS CANAL IN ART



A painting by Bloomfield Artist Charles Warren Eaton of the Liberty Street Bridge as seen from Montgomery Street, painted around 1890. Contrast this view with that shown on page two (bottom) of the March issue of the NTC showing almost the same scene as it was in 1948. The wooden truss bridge, common to the other bridges over the Canal, was later replaced in several locations when they proved too flimsy for heavy traffic (nor were they maintained in good order by the Morris Canal Company). The original of this painting is in the Museum of the Historical Society.



Another treasure of The HSOB Museum is this engraving by Frank Gregory, dated 1889. It is of a part of the Canal believed to have been above the Incline Plane in the Brookdale Area, possibly around Oak Tree Lane. If so, this is another peaceful scene that has been obliterated by the Garden State Parkway.



General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER
THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF BLOOMFIELD
90 Broad Street
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

OFFICERS

Jean M. Kuras, President
Mary Wilbert, Vice President
Emma-Lou Czarnecki, Treasurer
Audrey Moore, Recording Secretary
Dorothy Johnson, Curator

TRUSTEES

Dick West
Pat Cavanaugh
Mary Shoffner
Frederick Branch

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRPERSON

Pat Post

HOSPITALITY CHAIRPERSON

Marlena Bua

PRESERVATION CHAIRPERSON

Pat Cavanaugh

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Mary Wilbert

NEW TOWN CRIER STAFF

Frederick Branch, Editor
Pat Post, Assistant Editor
John Gibson, Ad Hoc

THE WELCOME MAT

A cordial welcome is extended to the following new members of The Historical Society of Bloomfield. We hope you will take note of our many activities and participate in any that you may choose.

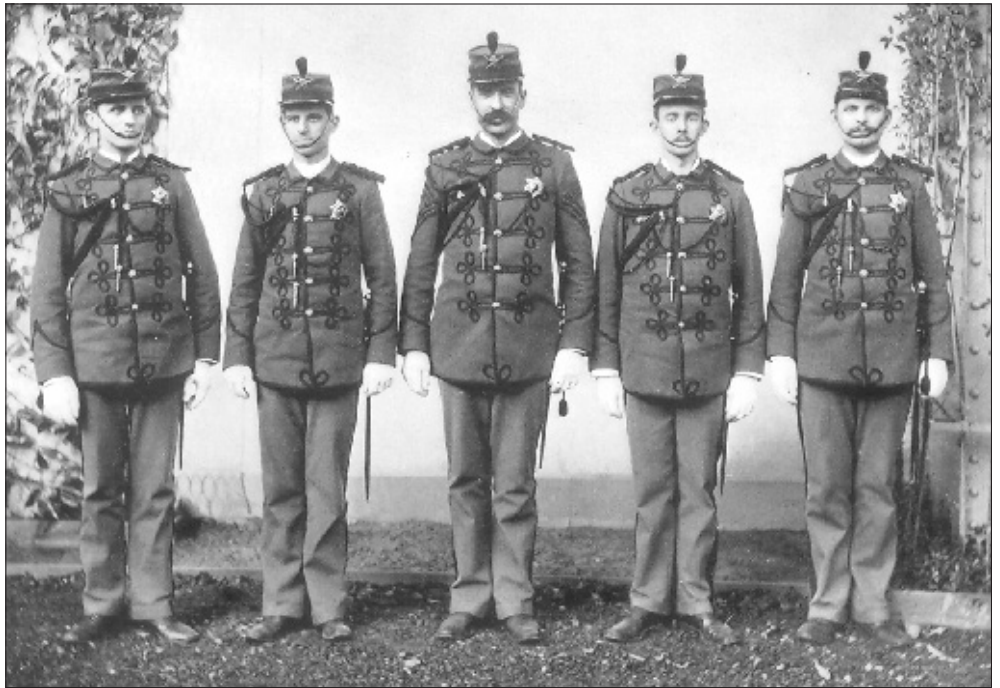
Mayor and Mrs. Raymond McCarthy,
Bloomfield, NJ
Suzette Faig, Glen Ridge, NJ
Glen Ridge Historical Society
Gayle Tunstead, Hanover Township, NJ
John Drennan, Bloomfield, NJ

If your dues have not been paid by June 30, 2007, this will be the last issue of *The New Town Crier* that you will receive.

E-MAIL THE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF BLOOMFIELD AT:
BlomfHist@aol.com
OR CALL US AT: 973-743-8844

NEWS FROM ... "The Bloomfield Citizen"

AUGUST 13, 1892



"Thomas Oakes and Company are busily engaged in manufacturing cloth to uniform the men employed at the World's Fair". The results of their labors can be seen above. The book in which this illustration appeared had this to say about "The Columbian Guard":

"...The number of these soldiers [sic] at one time reached 2,500. It was [believed] in 1891 that the [Chicago] city police would be inadequate to the extraordinary situation and, ...college students and Militia Men were sought and favored [for employment]. The result as attained on May of 1893 [the opening date] was one highly satisfactory to the...visiting public, which looked on the military aspect of the park with almost universal prejudice...[A]s the summer wore on, even the young martinets became genial and, at last, popular."

This heavily edited and paraphrased paragraph of Victorianese language (certainly not the English we know today) that was written and possibly spoken in 1893 is excerpted from a lengthy caption printed under the above photograph. It alludes to and attempts to excuse the officious attitude of these men in their fancy and over-the-top uniforms, who were ready, willing and eager to arrest somebody engaging in conduct forbidden on the fairgrounds. You had better keep off the grass, dispose of wastepaper properly, and *don't pick the flowers!*

Of course, the Oakes cloth won a medal when prizes were distributed in the closing days of October. A photograph exists of Thomas Oakes and his son David II, wearing the fashionable derby hats of the period, on their way to Chicago to accept the award.

SLATE OF NOMINATED OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES FOR 2007-09:

Jean Kuras, *President*
Mary Wilbert, *Vice President*
Emma-Lou Czarnecki, *Treasurer*
Audrey Moore, *Recording Secretary*
Dorothy Johnson, *Curator*
Trustees: Dick West
Pat Cavanaugh
Mary Schoffner
Frederick Branch

NEW TOWN CRIER STAFF
Frederick Branch, Editor
Patricia Post, Assistant Editor
John Gibson, Ad Hoc Editor

Grazie, merci, and many thanks

TO DODI DALZELL ... for her "hands on" assistance with stamping and labeling envelopes, folding newsletters, stuffing them into these envelopes and schlepping them to the Post Office in March and many times before. This is not only a tremendous help in getting them out on time, but a big boost in the morale department.

TO PAT POST ... for her steady supply of printed labels for the mailing envelopes and for her patience in deleting old names and adding new ones. Although Pat has a long commute to and from New York City each day and cannot attend Board Meetings, she has faithfully served as de facto Membership Chairperson for many months.

These are only two of the many others who also serve, God bless them. This publication could not survive without their help.

Frederick Branch
March 22, 2007