



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

MAY 2010

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING
TUESDAY, MAY 25, 2010

JILL ALEXANDER

*Director of Public Relations
and Advancement Marketing
of Bloomfield College*

will be our speaker.

Jill is a history buff and especially enjoys anecdotal history. She will be speaking about the history of Bloomfield College and its evolution from a small German-speaking Seminary to today's Liberal Arts College serving more than 2,000 students. (There is a ghost story in there, too.)

The meeting will be held at

THE CIVIC CENTER

84 Broad Street, Bloomfield, NJ

8:00 PM

Refreshments will be served.
Please come and bring
a friend...or two.

THE VAN LIEW RESIDENCE AT 177 FRANKLIN STREET

An unfortunate casualty of the construction of the 1939 Junior High School was the demolition of the stately brick residence of several distinguished Bloomfield citizens, all apparently connected by relationships to other well-known local families of the 19th century. The last resident of 177 Franklin Street was Alfred Butler Van Liew (1876-1956), who at the time of his death was living in an apartment at 5 Roosevelt Place in Montclair. The inscription on the back of the accompanying photo gives the following information: The photo is identified as: "a view of the Music Room taken around 1936. After Cousin Nell's death, occupied by A. D. Van Liew." Cousin Nell was Mrs. Harry E. Richards, the only daughter of Sarah Elizabeth Oakes (1833-1858), and Cornelius Van Liew (1826-1894). Mrs. Richards was also a niece of Thomas Oakes. She married Doctor Richards in the First Presbyterian Church (now The Church On The Green) in 1878.



Their wedding reception was held at the Thomas Oakes Residence at 249 Belleville Avenue just after the 1858 house had been enlarged from two to three stories, and the Tuscan tower, an important feature of the Italianate style, was increased in height to four stories. Except for some church steeples, this was probably the tallest structure in 19th century Bloomfield. The house was demolished in 1943.

The photo was probably one of a series taken by a professional photographer after the sale of the property to the Town of Bloomfield. The whereabouts of the others is unknown.

Other information from the back of the photo: the bronze girandoles on the marble mantelpiece were "from the Van Brunt home in Bay Ridge" (a section of Brooklyn). The date is given as "ca. 1936".

As for this room in the 19th century house, it has been completely de-Victorianized and brought up-to-date by its owners. With the exception of the marble mantel, tall windows and high ceiling, there is very little of the original interior to be seen. The fireplace is obviously no longer in use, the chairs are similar to those

available today, the draperies are simple and skimpy, the oriental rug is well worn, and the walls are painted or papered a plain color. The painting is by Charles Warren Eaton.* The evergreen branch on the mantel suggests that this is the last Christmas the Van Liews would spend on Franklin Street.

Mr. Van Liew was said to have been the first owner of motion-picture theatres in northern New Jersey. He had served as town counsel in 1910 and 1911, was president of The Board of the Bloomfield Public Library and Bloomfield Cemetery, secretary-treasurer of the Morris Society, a trustee of Bloomfield College, a vice-president of the Bloomfield Bank and Trust Company, and President Emeritus and former Board Chairman of the Westminster Presbyterian Church. At his death he was survived by a daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Johnstone of Geneva, Illinois, a son, Harry R. Van Liew of Saint James, Long Island, seven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. His firm, the Franklin Hill Company, developed Willard Avenue in the early 1900's.

*A similar painting by Eaton appeared on Channel 13's "Antiques Roadshow" on May 3 of this year.

THE PASSING OF THE MILLWHEEL

“The Passing of the Millwheel,” the following anonymous article copied from an early newspaper, *The Bloomfield Citizen*, contains a wealth of information about early Bloomfield industries, and is published verbatim in an attempt to preserve much valuable data, not only about manufacturing, but the connections of the people who were involved with it. To the best of the editor's knowledge, it does not appear in any other histories of Bloomfield.

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The Bloomfield Citizen, Bloomfield, N.J. 1913 CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT

Streams like the Second River, Toney's Brook, and Third River, flowing through Bloomfield and vicinity, and affording facilities for storing large bodies of water for power purposes, resulted in the early establishment of mills along the courses of these streams. Saw mills were, of course, the pioneer industry, followed by grist mills, and then, as the population increased, a variety of industries followed. The Morris canal, affording as it did, excellent water power as well as transportation facilities, added to the number and variety of the industries.

The water wheel was to those early mills and factories what the steam engine is to the industrial plants of the present day, [1913] and what electric motive power is destined to be to the industrial establishments of the future.

The water power plant at early times was cumbersome, and a large area of land was needed for the mill pond for water storage.

The advent of the steam engine and the railroad put water power out of consideration from an economic standpoint. There are those who predict that the electricity will do likewise with the steam engine, and that the combination of water power and electric current will be the future energizing force of the wheels of industry in the future and that the coal bin will be a thing of the past.

James I. Crisp, now nearly four score years, who served his apprenticeship as a machinist in the Hewes and Phillips iron works in 1832, in his younger days saw the water wheel give place to the steam engine in local factories and the “mill wright” gave way to the “engineer”. The mill wright was the vocational term applied to the man in charge of the man in charge of the water power machinery, while the “engineer” came to be the vocational term applied to the man who attended the steam engine.

When James Monroe was the superintendent of the Hendricks copper mill in Soho, [an early name of the south-western part of Belleville] took Mr. Crisp as a boy to the Hewes & Phillips iron works and got him placed there, the youth was fortunate in getting in one of the best establishments of the kind in those days and where a very thorough knowledge of the machinist trade in general and the building of steam engines in particular was acquired. In later years when all other industries were using steam power and Mr. Crisp was chief man in the machine shop of Baldwin & Ball, afterwards Baldwin & Son, his services were in demand at all the local mills when anything went wrong with the steam engine. Mr. Crisp can tell many interesting reminiscences of machinery and engine jobs done through the Baldwin firm, in Oakes's, Moffat's, Potter's, Benson's, Conger's mills, McCracken's paper mill, Adam's print works, Brown's mill, and Robert's wire mill, the copper works, and other mills in Franklin [Nutley] and Belleville. The late Harvey N. Dodd was the blacksmith at Baldwin's when Mr. Crisp was the machinist. According to Mr. Crisp's recollection, the first steam engine put in any factory in this immediate vicinity was in the woolen mill of Henry Wilde & Son in West Bloomfield [Montclair]. It was a Whitehall engine brought over here from England by the firm. The mill conducted by the Wilde firm was originally started in 1844 by Israel Crane and was called the West Bloomfield Manufacturing Company and made woolen and cotton goods. The power was obtained from Toney's Brook. The Wildes eventually turned it into a

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calico printing works and the business was taken to Wappinger Falls, N. Y. The mill was subsequently used for making straw board for band boxes. Grant J. Wheeler started that business and the late James C. Beach was at one time a partner in the business. Israel Crane, the starter of the mill, was a great man in these parts. He started the best large general store in West Bloomfield [Montclair] and was the promoter of the Newark and Bloomfield turnpike, a chartered toll road, and the owner of the big stone quarries that were in operation along both sides of Bloomfield Avenue near Mt. Prospect Avenue. His conspicuous connection with many enterprises earned him the sobriquet of "King Crane".

The next earliest mill in these parts, Mr. Crisp thinks, was in the Gwinn Paper Mill. This is the mill on the dividing line between Bloomfield and Belleville at the foot of Montgomery street. [the site of National Grain Yeast company, demolished about 20 years ago and now replaced by condos.] The mill pond is in Bloomfield and the factory buildings in Belleville. [It] was lately the coconut butter works.

The mill was started as a sawmill by a man named Mix, who sawed mahogany legs for cabinet makers. Mix sold to Miller and later Van Dyck, who conducted a chocolate factory there. Hugh F. Randolph* was the next owner and re-established the mahogany sawing business. Randolph sold out to Gwinn and a paper mill was started and was later on conducted by William Frame,* who owned the general stores at Bloomfield Centre, and was at one time sheriff of the county. Gwinn built another paper mill on the same site where he put in steam power. The mill was afterwards known as Kennedy's paper mill, and later on J. Hunt Adams started a calico print works in it.

Randolph and Van Liew's paper mill at what is now known as Race and West streets, was one of the early places in this town where steam power was used. A boiler explosion occurred there resulting in the death of one of the employees. James Boyle, the engineer to the paper mill subsequently was engineer at Oakes's mill. Two noted millwrights in Bloomfield before the steam engine was used here, were Joel Dunham and Joseph Fairbanks. Mr. Fairbanks was a ship carpenter by trade and took up millwright work, and Mr Crisp says he was one of the best all-around mechanics he ever knew.

The first steam engine put in any factory in the present Bloomfield, Mr. Crisp thinks, was a small oscillating engine made by Hewes and Phillips for Hall and Matthews, hatters, whose factory stood where Newark Avenue now starts at Franklin Street. The engine was the first of its kind built by Hewes and Phillips. Steam power was put in Moffat's rolling mill in Glen Ridge [then Bloomfield] in 1844 and in Oakes's mill, Mr Crisp thinks, in 1856, and later on in the Hendrick's copper mill.

A type of steam engine, designed by the late James McCracken, was built here by A. N. Baldwin & Son.

One of Bloomfield's most ingenious mechanics, Mr Crisp says, was Samuel Brower, who conducted a pasteboard box factory in Glen Ridge, [Bloomfield] which is now part of the park site [just east of Ridgewood Avenue].

Mr. Crisp speaks in the highest terms of his old employer, A. Newton Baldwin, who was a good mechanic and a devout old man.

Mr. Crisp is now and has long been engaged in the manufacture of leather belts for sewing machines, and his mechanical skill and preventive genius is manifested in many devices of his own make for furthering that work. (end of 1913 article).

*The Van Liew, Oakes, and Randolph families were related by marriage, as were many of the other prominent Bloomfield families mentioned above. The bracketed additions to the original text are intended to clarify the information and to bring it up to date.



General Joseph Bloomfield

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

90 Broad Street
Bloomfield, New Jersey 07003

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“OKAY ROYAL”

Back in the early days of the Great Depression, theatre owners were faced with the problem of filling rows of empty seats with patrons that the likes of sex pots Mae West and Sally Eihlers were unable to seduce into the half-empty houses. It wasn't the lack of good films; they had sound and, in some cases color, but Bloomfielders were reluctant to part with even a quarter admission when the “Big Bad Wolf” was at the door.

One smart entrepreneur thought of Dish Night: free chinaware given with each admission. (A rule of thumb was that the bigger the dish the worse the pictures. On nights when soup tureens were offered it was best to grab the dish and go home.) It was said that a large family on Orchard Street had a full set of dinnerware for eight...at the cost 25 cents apiece and of sitting through some dreadful “turkeys”.

Another gimmick involved a loud-mouthed emcee, gifted with a lot of chutzpah and the ability to sell the Brooklyn Bridge. Only these guys were not selling, they were buying!

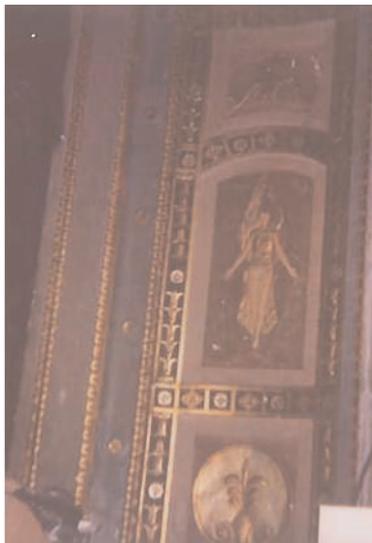
On these special evenings the second dreadful film was replaced by a contest of sorts. The geek onstage would offer to buy an article of clothing right off the back or feet of the first member of the audience to stand up, scream the words “OKAY ROYAL” and get to the stage ahead of any other patron. Among items of clothing purchased were neckties, gloves, scarves, and others that could be taken off while observing the strict ethics of the period. No underwear, socks, or anything else that couldn't be removed in public.

The money offered varied with the size of the items requested. A pair of shoelaces were priced at 25 cents, while five dollars was offered for men's shoes (both of them). It was a cold winter night in Bloomfield and no man relished the thought of risking pneumonia by walking home in the snow in stocking feet, but one lucky patron was wearing his rubbers. He put them on like slippers and went home five bucks richer. Unfortunately, there was a scene in the lobby after the show. His teen-age daughter marched up to her father and said “Oh, Daddy!” in a scandalized voice, managing to pack all of her humiliation into those two words. He chuckled good naturedly and replied: “I can get a brand-new pair tomorrow at Thom McAn's and enough change for a soda at the Del Crest.” He could, too.

No, these were not the legendary “Good Old Days”, but we were young and had the confidence that “someday” things would be different. And, thank God, they were.

Maybe we could try this game at one of the upcoming Historical Society meetings. Of course, the prices offered would have to be adjusted to be in line with the difference in value of the 1935 dollar vs the 2009 dollar. Anybody want to sell their shoelaces for five bucks? Just scream “OKAY, HSOB!” Remember, though, we want both of them.

Frederick Branch (I was there!)



ORNAMENTAL PLASTER IN THE ROYAL
Theatres of the 1920's were richly decorated with a mixture of various styles of ornament, cast in plaster and painted with rich colors and gold leaf. This was the bottom of the right side of the proscenium arch. It was destroyed during demolition of the theatre.