



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

March 2013

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, March 26, 2013

BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER

84 Broad Street,
Bloomfield, NJ
8:00 PM

Lost Bloomfield

Presented by Richard Rockwell

Enjoy an informative and entertaining presentation of before and after photos from Bloomfield's illustrious past. Explore the Bloomfield that used to be, when factory and store owners lived in stately homes on the Green and on Belleville Avenue. Compare them to what's there now: apartment buildings and the Garden State Parkway.

The then-and-now slide show is comprised of photos from the archives of the Historical Society of Bloomfield and the Russell Collection in the Glen Ridge Public Library. It consists of homes and buildings in the Bloomfield Historic District and Bloomfield Center that no longer exist, or were drastically changed, with comparison photos of the sites today.

Richard Rockwell is a local historian and resident of Halcyon Park. He is a Trustee on the HSOB Board, as well as Assistant Editor of *The New Town Crier*. He is responsible for digitizing, archiving and maintaining the HSOB's vast collection of historical photos and maps. He has created a number of historical websites, including those for the Halcyon Park Historic District, HSOB and for the area where he grew up in southwestern Pennsylvania: Eldora Park and the Charleroi Interurban electric railroad.

Rockwell has a Masters degree in education from Temple University and is a member of the Canal Society of NJ, Preservation NJ and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

FROM BLOOMFIELD TO BELGIUM AND BACK...



Two Charles Warren Eaton paintings were recently donated to the HSOB Museum. From left, HSOB volunteer Zulema Zapata, former President Dorothy Johnson, donor Charles Clark with "Bruges Canal," HSOB volunteer Anne Carlino and society President Jean Kuras. Photo by Daniel Jackovino

The HSOB recently received donations of two oil paintings by Charles Warren Eaton, noted American painter and Bloomfield resident (1857-1937). The untitled Belgian scenes, one of a church and the other a canal, were gifts from Charles Clark, a Connecticut resident and descendant of a significant township family—the Dodds—in memory of his grandparents and great-grandparents.

Providing descriptive titles himself, Clark gave "Bruges at Night", which depicts the city's medieval Jerusalem church, or Jeruzalemkirk, in memory of his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Moses H. Teaze, and "Bruges Canal" in memory of his great-grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Allison Dodd. Clark's great-grandfather, Allison Dodd, was the president of the former Bloomfield Bank and Trust Co.

"My grandmother and mother had paintings from him," Clark said during an interview at the museum. "Lots of Bloomfield families bought paintings from him."

Clark, the curator of an Eaton exhibit at the Montclair Museum in 1980, dated both paintings circa 1905.

Reprinted with permission from the June 14, 2012 issue of The Independent Press of Bloomfield.

South Side Story

In 1939, South Junior High was built on the spot of the elegant home of Mr. Willard Richards on 177 Franklin Street. At first, it was called Bloomfield Junior High until the construction of North Junior High (now called The Bloomfield Middle School) made a geographical differentiation necessary. The modernistic, dare we say futuristic, architecture was similar to that of the 1939-40 New York World's Fair ("The World of Tomorrow"), and looked forward to the future, rather than backward toward The Great Depression. At the time, it was a revolutionary art-deco design that supposedly shaped how public schools were designed and built for the next 40 years.

"South," as locals called it, shuttered its doors in 1986, when "North" became the "Middle School" for grades 7–8, and 9th graders from all corners of Bloomfield trundled off with trepidation to Bloomfield High School.

The three-story school was abandoned and has spent the last 27 years deteriorating where it stands, a target for vandals, petty arsonists, substance-abusers and the natural elements. Its once majestic, and slightly foreboding, presence has eroded over time before citizens' eyes.

However, according to the *Bloomfield Patch*, a long delayed development project of the historic building may be resurrected in the coming months. Developer Lance Robbins said in

January he wants to immediately revive the apartment project at the long-vacant South Junior High School.

Robbins, who is the owner of Urban Smart Grown and also the owner of the building, said the project came to a halt in 2008 when the stock market collapsed and he couldn't secure financing, but, "people want to build apartment buildings again, and so do we," he said.

The original proposal wanted to build about 114 studio apartments of between 800 and 1,000 square feet in size. In addition, about 17 penthouses would be added to the roof of the building that will have a view of the New York City skyline. The project has the potential to begin by July of 2013, suggested Robbins, and if all goes according

to plan, the rehabilitation of the building would take about 10 to 12 months.

However, Robbins told the Bloomfield Town Council that starting construction will depend upon "help" from federal historic tax credits and the township in order to make it a "viable project again."

Robbins's request for assistance from the town (in the form of a slight reduction in the parking requirements, among other things) and the renewed interest in the project after years of silence drew criticisms from some council members, especially as Robbins owes \$650,000 in back taxes for the property, which he said would be paid before construction begins.

What will be the fate of this glorious old building? Stay tuned...



The front of South Junior High School, as it appears today.



The rear entrance of the school, as seen from Walnut Street. Photo by John Lee

The Collins House Historic Site

By Richard Rockwell

The Collins House sits between Kinder Towers and Baldwin St., between JFK Drive and the Third River. In the winter when the trees are bare, you can see it across the river behind McDonald's on Broad Street. The Township bought the property from the Marcal Paper Company in 1981 and it has been vacant since 2005. The non-profit organization **Friends of the Collins House** is hoping to save the house, restore the main section as a residence for a caretaker and landscape the area around the house as part of a state-wide Morris Canal Greenway.



The house is historically significant for a number of reasons. John Collins (1754–1806), who built the house, was one of the founding members of the Presbyterian Society of Bloomfield from which Bloomfield got its name. Built in 1790, it is one of the oldest surviving houses in Bloomfield—older than the Township itself. It represents a unique architectural style—East Jersey Cottage—one of few remaining in our state. It predates the development that grew up around it, beginning with mill ponds and mills along the Third River (a paper mill that survived into the 1980s and a flour mill that later became the Combination Rubber Manufacturing Company), and the Morris Canal, whose Inclined Plane 11 East bisected the Collins property.



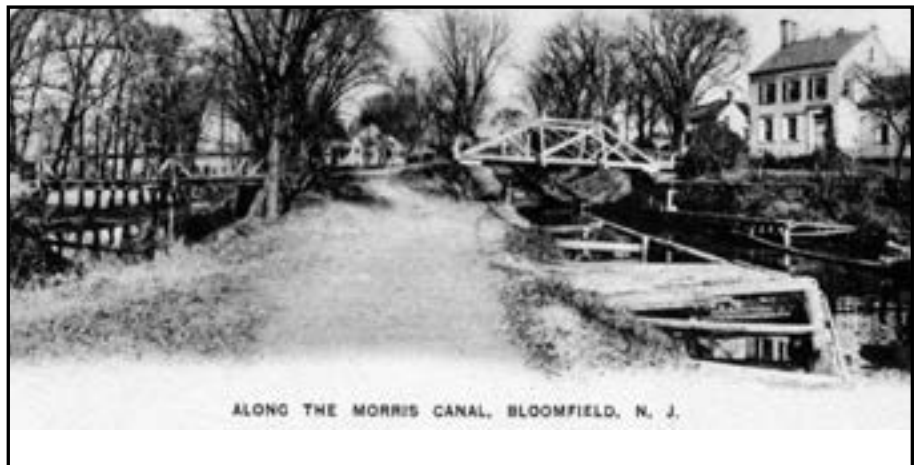
John Collins' son Isaac (1786–1841) and his son, John (1824–1906) were carpenters. Isaac built the current larger section of the house, and both Isaac and John worked for the Morris Canal building bridges, boats, aqueducts and inclined



planes, including the inclined plane next to the house. The original plane built here, designed by Bloomfield native Ephraim Morris, won a contest for inclined plane design. The location of the inclined plane is now the ramp from Baldwin Street up to Hoover Avenue on JFK Drive.

If you would like to help save the Collins House by volunteering or making a contribution, contact **Friends of the Collins House** at info@CollinsHouse.org.

For more information about the Collins House, including historical photos and maps, visit the Collins House website at <http://CollinsHouse.org>.





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:

Joan Dorfman,
West Orange, NJ

Roger L. Hall,
Stoughton, MA

What do Queen Victoria, opium, and tea have in common?

Come find out in this armchair journey to the fabled land of 19th century China. Dolly Rosen, culinary historian and Montclair resident, will present "Chinese Culture & Customs in the 19th Century," discussing food, festivals, fashion and the complex relationship between East and West in the 19thC. March 13 at 7:30pm, 82 Union St., Montclair, NJ. Presented by *The Northern NJ Chapter of The Victorian Society in America*, whose Silent Auction fundraising event will also be held the same night.

Congrats to Cryptogram Winners.

And the winners of our Bloomfield Brain Buster from the October 2012 issue are:

- Maureen Conta
- Jean Kuras & Janis Lee
- Eileen Larkin
- Eileen Pedalino

The answer to the puzzle was:

"The Native American name for the Third River was Watsessing, which means 'crooked' or 'elbow like.'"

Get your copies of *Bloomfield & Bloomfield Revisited!*

The history of Bloomfield leaps off the pages of *Bloomfield* and *Bloomfield Revisited*, books in two retrospective volumes of illuminating photos and facts, available for purchase at the HSOB Museum. *Bloomfield* was written by current HSOB President Jean Kuras; Mark Sceurman, former HSOB President and co-publisher of *Weird NJ*; and Frederick Branch, founding member of both the HSOB and the Northern NJ Chapter of the Victorian Society in America.

The extensive research and vintage photographs (many previously unpublished) in both books capture the essence of a community with small-town values and working-class ethics. Images such as those of inventor Thomas Edison, President Woodrow Wilson and landscape painter Charles Warren Eaton make *Bloomfield* and *Bloomfield Revisited* must-haves for all past and present residents of our historic town.

Visit the museum and pick up your copies today. Located on the 3rd floor of the Children's Library at 90 Broad Street, hours are Wed. 2:00pm–4:30pm, Sat. 10:00am–12:30pm and by appointment. PH: (973) 743-8844. Cost for each book is \$15.99 for HSOB members and \$19.99 for non-members.

