



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

MARCH 2019

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

7:30 PM

BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER

84 Broad Street, Bloomfield, NJ

Iron Coffin Mummies of New Jersey & New York

Presented by Scott Warnasch

Experience a holistic glimpse into the investigation surrounding the identity of a woman found inside a Fisk iron coffin disturbed by construction crews in New York City. Through forensic investigation with archaeology, biology and history, Archeologist/



Anthropologist Scott Warnasch identified the woman as an African American domestic servant who had died of smallpox in the early 1850s.

Warnasch will also tell of two other iron coffin mummies he has discovered in Newark, NJ, and will include background on the coffins and what they teach us about this critical period of American history. Warnasch is writing his first book about his research into the lives of three mid-19th century iron coffin mummies he has discovered, including the subject of the PBS series *Secrets of the Dead* episode, "The Woman in the Iron Coffin."

A 20-year resident of Bloomfield, Warnasch is a graduate of William Paterson Univ. and Hunter College, and is a *Weird New Jersey* magazine contributor. *Free.*



In an undated photo, Fred Branch works on a model of the Bloomfield Cemetery gatehouse. Branch died leaving the work unfinished.

Photo by Daniel Jackovino

In Memoriam: Frederick Branch August 26, 1925–November 4, 2018

Frederick Branch, architectural model-maker, foremost Bloomfield historian and life-member of the Historical Society of Bloomfield (HSOB), died at his Forest Drive home on Sunday, Nov. 4, 2018. He was 93.

A graduate of Bloomfield High School (Class of 1943), Branch was born August 26, 1925. He lived in Kearny until 1927, when his family moved to the Bloomfield home where he would reside for the rest of his life.

Branch was taking a class in model-making when the instructor looked at his final classroom project, a model of a living room, and told him, "That will get you a job." Branch took the model to the Jersey City studio of Theodore Conrad and was hired; he worked there from 1959 to 1970.

In 1970, he began working for the Bloomfield Public Library as head of its Audio/Visual department. He coordinated the restoration of the Little Theatre, located in the basement of the Children's Library. He is responsible for the plaster designs that decorate the theater, a craft he learned from an uncle, Philip Mullenthaler, who decorated NYC movie houses, including the Roxy Theatre, and in Bloomfield, the Royal Theatre. Branch left the library in 1985.

He also worked for the Newark Museum as a restorer. His model of the Ballantine House is on exhibit.

As a Board member of the HSOB, Branch was the editor the newsletter, "The New Town Crier," retiring in 2010. A plaque dedicated in his honor has been donated by the HSOB Board and hangs in the museum.

Branch also co-authored two books, "Bloomfield," and "Bloomfield Revisited," for the Arcadia Press "Images of America" series.

"[Fred] loved Bloomfield," recalled HSOB President Jean Kuras. "What he knew, he knew from his heart as well as his mind. That makes a difference."

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

Kuras also recalled one time when Branch wanted a color photograph in the “The New Town Crier.” In order to do that, the picture had to be printed separately, cut out, and then hot-glued into 80 newsletters. The work was done on Branch’s dining room table. Heating the glue kept setting off the fire alarm and fumes kept the both of them leaving the house for fresh air.

“It was agony,” Kuras laughed. “But it was a beautiful newsletter.

“I was always impressed with his encyclopedic memory for names and dates,” said Bloomfield Councilman and HSOB Trustee Rich Rockwell. “Often when a history question comes up among colleagues, after some research through the index of old newsletters, we usually discover Fred wrote an article about it.”

Branch also was instrumental in locating the unmarked grave in Bloomfield Cemetery of Alexander Jackson Davis, an eminent 19th century architect. The discovery helped get the cemetery designated an historic site. Branch was interred there, in the family plot, in a private service. — *Daniel Jackovino, The Independent Press*

We are deeply saddened to hear of Fred’s passing. Fred was a tireless worker who held Bloomfield and its history close to his heart. There is so much valuable history here in this area of Bloomfield, Belleville and Nutley, most of which people are unaware of, that the passing of someone with Fred’s dedication will be deeply missed.

As Historical Societies, we must continue to carry on Fred’s work and continue to educate the young to keep the flame of History burning brightly. We at the Nutley Historical Society will continue to support our friends in Bloomfield so that together we can carry on with our mission of not allowing our fabled history to be forgotten. Our deepest condolences.

—**Dom Tibaldo, President, Nutley Historical Society & Museum**

I was introduced to Fred Branch in 1979 by Terry Webster, President of the Glen Ridge Historical Society. I was preparing a slide talk for our annual meeting and Fred helped me make slides using a contraption that could photograph printed images. I discovered very quickly that he knew a lot about Bloomfield and Glen Ridge history. Over the years, he answered lots of questions and told me many stories about people, places and events from long ago. I especially liked it when Fred invited me to his house. It had quite a chaotic look but Fred knew just where to find some piece of information I needed. I think of him often in my efforts as town historian to be sure of the facts of a story.

—**Sally Meyer, Glen Ridge Town Historian**

Bloomfield’s Benevolent “Wendy” By John Debold



Mr. Wendell Phillips Felton

As Bloomfield is a five-mile-long town, many—but not all—residents are aware of Felton Field at the extreme south end of town. For nearly three decades, Bloomfield was proud to have this field’s namesake, **Mr. Wendell Phillips Felton**, as a guiding force in recreational activities for children.

Since 1919, the 3.75-acre Floyd Avenue field has had a rich history that will be more fully explored in a future issue. This field was renamed for Mr. Wendell Felton, a longtime Bloomfield resident who dedicated his time and career to recreation and sports for Bloomfield’s children.

Wendy, or more affectionately known to Bloomfielders as “Windy,” had been, since 1938, a recreation department official, starting as Director of Activities & Maintenance. However, he was really a jack of all trades, sports-wise—umpire, coach, instructor, leader, organizer and field repairer when necessary. Born in Morristown on April 22, 1897, one of 14 children, the family moved to Bloomfield in 1912. After attending Berkeley School, Wendy graduated from Bloomfield High School (BHS) in 1919 with 55 other seniors. In his Senior Year he was captain of the track team.

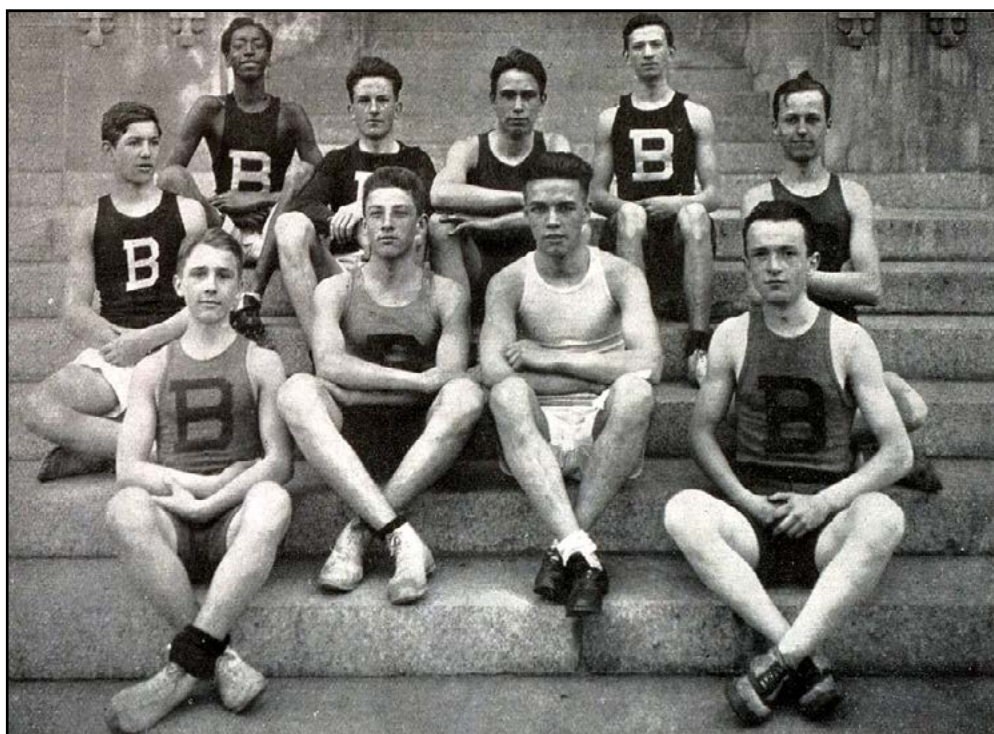
This student-athlete, a rare “four letter man” (track, basketball, football and baseball) starred in track at Colgate University. His heart, however, was in his home town.

He returned to 22 Alva Street and after a stint with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), he began a long and distinguished career in numerous organizations in the area. In addition to work with children and sports, he seemed to be a member of every organization whose purpose was to help people in need. He married Dorothy May later in life, in 1953.

While I was only 15 years old at the time of his passing, I had the pleasure to know “Mr. Felton” (only after he got to know you for a while did one feel comfortable calling him Wendy or Windy.) As a contemporary of mine recently remembered, “Wendy was always positive and upbeat, a friendly joy of a man.” He also remembered, as did I, his raspy voice and the fact that he would peer down at his subject over his Ben Franklin glasses that were placed low on his nose.

He was stern with us kids but you always knew he cared for us and was fair...he loved kids. His philosophy was: “You get out of this world what you put into it.” He did, in fact, put so much good into our little corner of the world.

When he died in January 1965, the student body of BHS was dismissed early to witness his funeral procession passing on Broad Street.




Sophomore track star Wendy Felton is pictured on the steps of BHS in 1917 (top left). The Independent Press 1965

WENDELL FELTON

Windy

“My feet refuse to be still.”
Just a very little music will cause a dance from Windy. He particularly delights in the shimmy and may often be found demonstrating its intricacies to an interested group of students in the halls.





HARRY BRADY

Harry
“They go wild, simply wild over me.”
Alto Harry never shows as a scholar he manages to get a lot out of school. He is particularly in favor with the office and may be found there at almost any time in the day. Unfortunately he hates girls in general, and pretty ones especially.



WENDELL FELTON

Windy
“My feet refuse to be still.”
Just a very little music will cause a dance from Windy. He particularly delights in the shimmy and may often be found demonstrating its intricacies to an interested group of students in the halls.



RAYMOND LOPPACKER

Ray
From football togs
Into the nation's khaki.
When early last fall Ray deserted the gridiron to answer his country's call, we all, as well as the football squad, felt the loss of it's captain. Now after some months absence he is back with us again and we all feel sure that old B. H. S. was well represented in the U. S. Marine Transport Corps. We're glad to see you back, Ray!

1919 BHS Senior Yearbook Photo.

Author’s note: The rich history of the former Sprague Field or General Electric Field (now Felton Field), constructed in 1919, will be presented in a later issue with information from a story by former, longtime Bloomfield resident and baseball historian William “Bill” Lamb. At one time, the ballpark could seat 3,000 spectators and hosted amateur, semi-pro, minor league and Negro Leagues baseball.



General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER

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Can you identify?

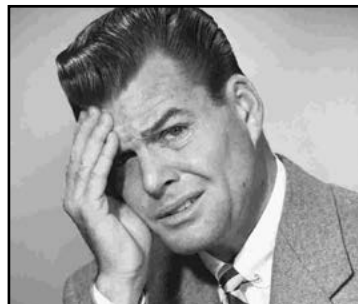
Where in Bloomfield are these Wild Boar's Head gargoyles?

Bruce Anderson of Glen Ridge knew the answer: "The wild boar gargoyles are on the front of the Leo Building (2 Broad Street) above the main door to the PNC Bank. They are way up high almost to the roof."



April 27: Hike the Morris Canal Greenway in Bloomfield

On this 3-mile hike, conducted by Bloomfield Councilman Rich Rockwell and Ron Rice, explore the path of the Morris Canal through Bloomfield, then take a bus ride for an additional two miles, stopping at the newly reclaimed section of the canal at Oak Tree Lane. Space is limited; reservations are required. A \$5 donation is requested to cover costs of bus and 20-page handout with historic photos and color maps. To reserve a space, email MorrisCanal@gmail.com



Reminder!

If you haven't already done so, please be sure to renew your 2019 membership. Renewal forms are available at www.hsob.org or can be picked up at the museum or any HSOB meeting. The HSOB is a non-profit organization, therefore all dues and donations are considered a tax-free contribution. Help keep the Historical Society of Bloomfield strong with your continuing membership!

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 Dodd
<i>Manasquan, NJ</i> | Fran Duffy & Scott Freier
<i>Bloomfield</i> | Linda Johns
<i>Bloomfield</i> | Shana Lynch
<i>Bloomfield</i> | Santos Menendez
<i>Bloomfield</i> |
| Jaclyn & Michael Varland
<i>Shamong, NJ</i> | | | | |