



# The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

May 2014

## SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, May 27, 2014

**BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER**

84 Broad Street,  
Bloomfield, NJ

**7:30 PM**

## Magic Lantern Adventure

Presented by Don Cornell

Come out and enjoy a program your parents or grandparents may have seen in 1930, as the HSOB presents **Magic Lantern Adventure**. The program will feature a digitally enhanced presentation of original hand-colored magic lantern slides featuring some of Bloomfield's historic locations.

The Magic Lantern, an early form of image projector, was believed to be invented in the 1650s (or possibly even in the 15th century). Even after the invention of the modern motion picture projector, the Magic Lantern continued to be used by magicians. There are even some examples of somewhat naughty striptease slides starting in the 1920s and proceeding through the first half of the 20th century. Today, the Magic Lantern is primarily used only by collectors.



*The Presbyterian Church, School House and Parish House as they looked in 1848.*

In 1930, Bloomfield's Presbyterian Church on the Green presented a slide program of hand-colored magic lantern slides of historical sites in Bloomfield. This would have been considered a state-of-the-art multimedia presentation at the time. The slide collection was rediscovered in 1967 and presented again. Recently, when church

## *Lest We Forget...*

This World War I era poster urges citizens to remember to honor the brave who had served in America's Armed Forces. The wars referenced in the poster are The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), The War of 1812 (1812-1814), The Mexican-American War (1846-1847), The American Civil War (1861-1865) and The Spanish-American War (1898).



The poster was created for Memorial Day, 1917. WWI or "The Great War" was still raging, but ended on November 18, 1918. So horrific was the carnage and destruction, it was termed "The War to End All Wars." Sadly, this was not to be, as no one then could foresee the deadly conflicts that would afflict the rest of the 20th Century.

## ***March with us on Memorial Day***

As we commemorate in 2014 the 100th anniversary of the start of World War One, The Historical Society of Bloomfield seeks members and non-members to march with us in the Memorial Day Parade down Broad Street on May 26. Adults, children and well-behaved dogs are all welcome to march under the HSOB banner. Show your civic pride and support the HSOB at the same time! For more info, call Jean at 973-743-1940 or email [info@hsob.org](mailto:info@hsob.org).

elder Don Cornell was going through the Church's archives, he rediscovered the slides yet again, along with the original narration that had been prepared for the 1930 and 1967 programs.

The program will be presented, using the original commentary, by Don Cornell. Antique Magic Lantern projectors will be on display, as well. The event is open to the public, free of charge and refreshments will be served, so bring a friend! More info: [www.hsob.org](http://www.hsob.org), 973-743-8844, [info@hsob.org](mailto:info@hsob.org).

# The History of Gas Lighting in Bloomfield

By Richard Rockwell

When gas was first used for street lights, it was manufactured by “cooking” coal in a process called “coal gasification.” Oakes Mill, which produced woolens and textiles, was on the cutting edge of lighting technology, being the first site in Bloomfield to use gas for lighting in 1858.

*Oil was used for lighting purposes in the mill until 1858, when a gas plant was installed on the mill premises and coal gas was produced for lighting the mill buildings. This was the first gas-making plant in Bloomfield, and antedated the Montclair Gas & Water Company’s (sic) plant on West Street by many years. (The Turn of the Century: The Record of the House of Thomas Oakes & Company as their Centennial Anniversary is Celebrated. 1830–1930). Editor’s note: The correct name of the plant on West Street was the Montclair & Bloomfield Water & Gas Company.*



A gas lamp in front of the Bloomfield Cycling & Athletic Association, 615 Bloomfield Avenue. (Photo: Russell Collection, Glen Ridge Public Library)

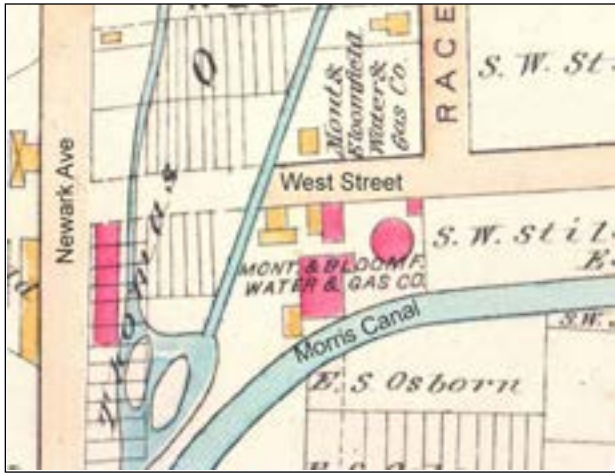
Gas street lamps were installed in Bloomfield in 1873, a full fifteen year after the Oakes Mill’s gas lights were installed. According to Rachel F. Diamond in her 1962 book *One Hundred Fifty Years around the Green*, “The township, keeping pace with the times, buried a great worm of gas pipes under the streets, bringing the luxury of light and fuel to many homes. But the town fathers were thrifty. On nights when the moon bathed the

Green in soft light, no lamps were lit.”

Gas mains were laid in Bloomfield’s Lamp District, which covered the entire town south of Bay Lane (see map below). After the horse-drawn streetcar lines were electrified in 1890, “a number of merchants at the



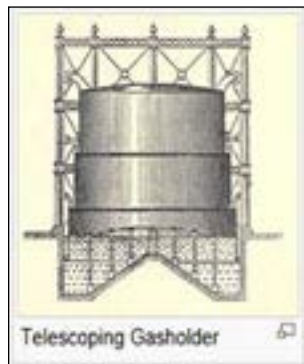
*Gas mains were installed in all of Bloomfield south of Bay Lane. According to this 1856 map from the HSOB Museum, Bay Lane was slightly northwest of where Bay Avenue is located today. It looks as though the street no longer exists, as it doesn't appear in a 1906 map or more recent maps.*



Bloomfield's gas plant was the Montclair & Bloomfield Water & Gas Company located on the Morris Canal between the Canal and West Street. This photo by Nathan Russell was taken after the Gas Works closed in 1891. (Photo: Russell Collection, Glen Ridge Public Library; Map: 1890 Robinson Atlas)

Centre expressed a desire to see electric lights introduced in order to illuminate their stores with them," according to *The Bloomfield Citizen* (November 15, 1890).

Gas manufacturing at the Gas Works stopped in 1891 and gas was then supplied by the Newark Gas Light Company through a connection in Belleville. The early coal gas distribution systems consolidated and grew into our current natural gas distribution system.

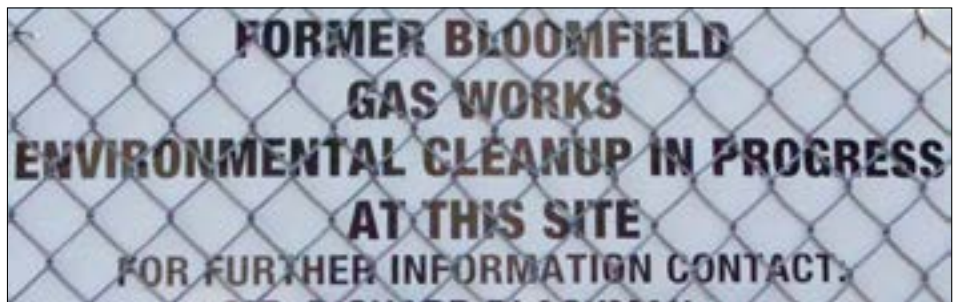


This metal structure held a telescoping tank called a gasholder or gasometer that rested in a pool of water. As gas was produced, the pressure raised the tank. The pressure from the weight of the tank distributed the gas. (Photo: History of Manufactured Gas, Wikipedia.org)

Thomas Edison's company was among the companies vying for the franchise for the town's electricity contract, offering to install experimental prototypes on the street. Initially, it looked like Edison would get the contract for electric lighting in Bloomfield, but the town backed out, partly because Edison didn't agree to the terms of the contract, and partly because people thought electricity was still experimental and too dangerous, and gas lighting was just fine. Also, advancements were being made in the technology of electricity all the time, and some thought it would be better to wait in case the technology became quickly outdated.

Many people also objected to electric lights because of the unsightly and dangerous overhead wires. The town sought bids for an underground system, but that proved to be too expensive.

Oakes Mill, continuing to be the leader in lighting technology, built its own electric light plant and installed electric lighting in 1890. The town followed with electric street lights shortly thereafter.



One of the by-products of coal gasification was tar, which was used to waterproof boats and lubricate the cables on the Morris Canal's inclined planes. Other by-products of coal gasification were toxic air pollution and other toxic waste. From the sign recently posted at the location of the former Gas Works, environmental cleanup is in progress. (Photo: Richard Rockwell)



*General Joseph Bloomfield*

### THE NEW TOWN CRIER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF  
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF BLOOMFIELD

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## 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 October 2014 issue of *The New Town Crier*, along with the names of the winners. The sender of the **very first** correct solution emailed to [H SOB1812@gmail.com](mailto:H SOB1812@gmail.com) will win a Map of Bloomfield jigsaw puzzle, graciously donated by Jane & Wayne Bond.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

20	25	4	16	14	23	2	20	25	23	15	14	10	11	14	10	1	22	16	20	25	21			
15	23	1	20	11	15	4	15	20	25	10	2	2	4	13	21	1	16	10	1	11	23	15		
20	25	21	23	19	21	2	4	2	6	23	15	20	25	21	25	4	16	20	23	1	4	8	10	7
16	23	8	4	21	20	11	23	15	18	7	23	23	14	15	4	21	7	26	14	17	16	21	17	14
16	4	20	17	10	20	21	26	23	2	20	25	21	20	23	19	15	7	23	23	1				
23	15	20	25	21	8	25	4	7	26	1	21	2	16	7	4	18	1	10	1	11				

### *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:

Tyeese Gaines &  
David Lassher  
*Bloomfield*

Mark Scurman  
*Bloomfield*

Sharon Waters  
*Bloomfield*

## Don't miss...

HANDS, Inc., a non-profit organization committed to revitalization of neighborhoods in Orange and East Orange, NJ, will be receiving the **2014 Preservation Award** for its restoration of the Valley Arts Firehouse Gallery on May 15 from the **Victorian Society in America, Northern NJ Chapter**. The event will be held at the Valley Arts Firehouse Gallery, located at 580 Forest St. Orange, NJ. A guided tour of the Arts District will begin at 5pm, followed by the award presentation and gallery show opening at 6pm. Parking is available and refreshments will follow. More info: [www.handsinc.org](http://www.handsinc.org)

## Letters to the HSOB

Hi,

My wife and I are very disappointed that we will not be in town to be able to participate in such a wonderful adventure (The HSOB March meeting titled *Tour of Historic Bloomfield*). I grew up in Brookdale and I believe that there were remnants of a Tow Path behind my home. Bloomfield is a fine [town] with wonderful history.

Sincerely,

Audrey & Don Gregg, Morris Plains, NJ

*The HSOB was doubly disappointed that you could not be there, but we'll look for you at the May meeting. Our thanks to the Gregg Family for continuing to stay in touch with your Editor, and for their kind words always.*