



# The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

SEPTEMBER 2008

## MEETING

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2008  
8:00 PM  
BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER  
84 Broad Street, Bloomfield

### *S. David Phraner* *“A Late Victorian Family in Bloomfield”*

The Historical Society has hosted speakers with 35 millimeter slide shows and power point programs. Now, join us for a delightful evening of projected glass lantern slides!

These fascinating pictures were taken by our speaker’s grandfather, Wilson S. Phraner, an accomplished amateur photographer and member of the Orange Camera Club. His work is archived at the New Jersey Historical Society Collection. Phraner’s extensive collection of glass lantern slides consisting of family, Bloomfield, The Holy Land and other domestic subjects is now conserved by his grandson. Wilson S. Phraner maintained a photographic darkroom at his residence, 23 Spruce Street. The house was demolished when the Garden State Parkway was constructed in 1954 along the southeast side of Spruce Street between Fremont and Montgomery Streets.

Our guest speaker will talk about his family from the Late Victorian era to the 1950’s. His talk will be illustrated by this marvelous collection of glass lantern slides and will extend to a discussion of the development of photography.

S. David Phraner is currently active in local and State historical and preservation causes including directorships in the Canal Society of New Jersey and the Friends of the New Jersey Transportation Heritage Center.

The popcorn is on us! Come and bring a friend.

## Davey’s Woods

*By John A. Gibson, Jr.*



Few people driving over the bridge on Belleville Avenue that crosses the Garden State Parkway realize that the north side of the bridge was once the premier sled riding location site in Essex County for kids of the 1930’s and 40’s – the “Cow Lots.” Fewer still know that, at the end of the “Cow Lots,” was the beginning of Davey’s Woods. One would have to line up for the thrill of a lifetime to sled down the vast hill with the big bump in the middle. At the end, if you were not familiar with the ride, you could land up in the brook, unless you made a sharp right turn which would carry you into Davey’s Woods. The walk back up the hill was arduous and long.

A very old fence post was the remnant of a fence and a tangle of tree roots marked the entrance to the woods. Once there, you would follow the well-worn path down along the Third River, known as “The Brook”. A short way down the brook was the “eel hole.” At one time it held eels and the promise of an occasional trout that had managed to get over the dam at Oakes’ Pond. An overturned rock might give a glimpse of a crayfish before it scooted off to a safer location.

As you continued along the path, you would pass through the muddy flat water above the old Davey’s Pond site and over the dam (it’s still there, if you know where to look). Beyond, there were the ruins of the old paper mill with its riveted pipes and fresh water spring that was inhabited by small shrimp. Great places to wander about! If you wanted to roam the woods, there were acres to ramble.

Today, most of that is gone, “collateral damage” as the military might say, of the Garden State Parkway and garden apartment construction. Still, there is a patch of woods left to give an alternative to noise and traffic and side-by-side houses. It would be sad to lose what is left to “progress.”

## Historic Photos

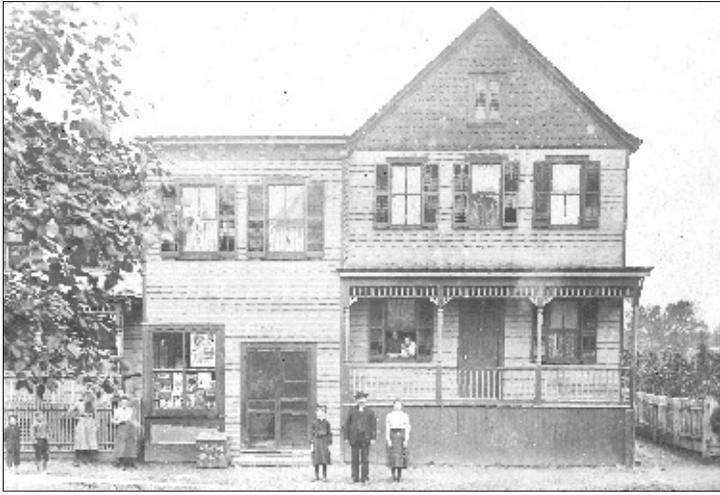
Patrons of the American Savings Bank in North Center have seen this friendly establishment grow and prosper over the years. This year there was a move to a new building a short distance south of the original. The architect of the new bank might have been influenced by that of Frank Lloyd Wright’s “Prairie Style” that originated in Chicago around 1900. The roof has a low pitch with a wide overhang and the exterior walls are an attractive dark red brick. One feature, not necessarily apparent to the viewer, is



the way the new structure respects the older buildings in the area. It neither dominates them by unusual height nor do the walls curve out at strange angles to assault the eye.

The decoration of the interior also deserves mention. The spaces of the various departments work well with each other and the structure adapts itself to an unusual site. A part of the interior decor guaranteed to please the eye, is a set of about 20 beautifully framed and colored views of Bloomfield Center and the Morris canal, two of which are shown here. The management has issued a color brochure describing the various locations. Shown above are: the original DL&W Railroad Station on Glenwood Avenue; and a view of Broad Street looking south toward Bloomfield Avenue in the early 1900’s.

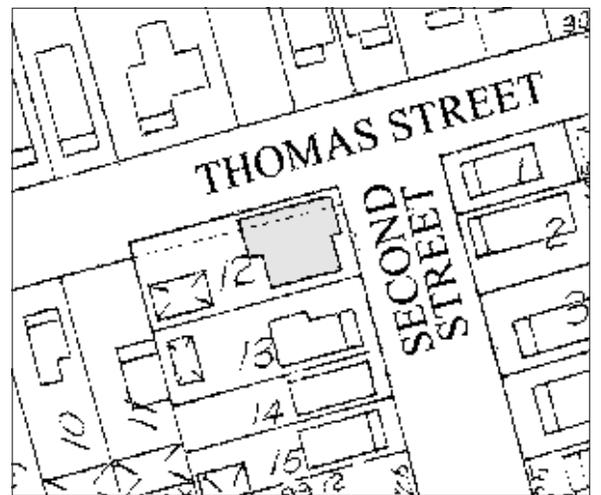
## Thomas and Second Streets



A faded photograph pasted on crumbling cardboard is an interesting gift to the Historical Society from Pat Ritchings. A faint pencil inscription on the back says "Thomas and Second Street" and "owned store". The photographer was J. Guthorn, Photographer of New York City. Obviously the owners of this property were very proud of it and had hired a professional photographer to document the building, which may have just been enlarged. The 1907 map shows two separate buildings; the 1932 map shows the two joined by the store in the center. The occupants of the store/houses are lined up in military formation for the photographer ("who came all the way from New York").

A recent field trip to this location was a surprise. It is difficult to imagine what has happened in the meantime. Thomas Street has been widened and paved, which may be the reason for removing the 2½ story house on the corner. Other changes include the elimination of the store window and much of the house on the left behind the tree. Also lost are the quaint picket fences and the row of hollyhocks along Thomas.

It is rare to find photos of out-of-the-way places in Bloomfield and the Society is grateful to Pat for her contribution to the archives.



1932 map

## ~~~~~ The Barths of Spring Street ~~~~~

A collection of a number of snapshots made of and by members of the Barth family (who lived in the Brookdale Area and were in the florist business at 38 Division Street in 1920), was found on the internet by Ed Steckowicz of Nutley, who bought them to give to the Historical Society of Bloomfield. A few of these have already appeared in this publication, but the only interior photo found among them is rare for the period and an accomplishment, considering the crude cameras available for amateur photographers in those days. It is published here for the first time.

It is rare to find any identification on the back of snapshots and this one is, unfortunately, no exception. However, the original envelope containing the pictures came from a drug store on Broad Street near the corner of James and the clerk had written "Barth" on the front, thus identifying the photographer.

It is a matter of record that Johanna Barth, a native of Germany, had purchased a piece of the old Baldwin farm around 1890. She was married to Michael Barth and they had several children. The name of at least one daughter and her husband can be found on a marker in nearby Mount Olivet Cemetery. It is likely that the



*Probably by accident, the camera has also recorded a still-life arrangement of glass milk bottle, cooking pan, pie plate, and some fresh vegetables. This in itself is a work of art and has been enlarged to show some of its detail.*

lady standing in the middle is Johanna and that her husband is seated to the left. We do not know the name of the young man to the right but it could be assumed that he is their son. And it is almost a sure thing that he has set his Kodak on another table in the Barth kitchen at almost exactly 12 o'clock noon and taken a very successful time exposure of his grandparents, himself, and an early 20th century kitchen.

# The Case of the Missing Madonna

Move over Jane Marple. Put away your fingerprint kit, Jessica Fletcher. The is a new sleuth in town: Mary Stark.

On a sunny autumn afternoon, visitors to the Green walked by holding colorful balloons and bags of buttery popcorn, enjoying the festivities of Harvest Fest 2006. At the Historical Society exhibit, a friendly conversation was being enjoyed by two women. The important woman is Mary Stark. An off-hand question, a casual remark ignited a curiosity: "What became of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary that stood on the grounds of the Murray Funeral Home on Belleville Avenue from 1951 until some-



time before the Funeral Home merged with another and the building was demolished?"

Our detective accepted the challenge and the game was afoot.

Mary has lived in Bloomfield since 1931. She knows the town and its people. Her friends at the Knights of Columbus remembered the statue well. Vernon Colby, Grand Knight of the Bloom-

field Chapter, was responsible for organizing the effort that created it. The base and its transportation to Belleville Avenue were paid for by the Knights of Columbus. It was dedicated on Mother's Day 1957 by Monsignor Thomas Burke, Pastor of Sacred Heart Church. Mary contacted Doris Bill and Peggy Dunigan, friends of the Murrays, and learned from Peg that the statue was given by the Murrays to Bishop Bootkowski. Mary approached Sister Maria Michael, hoping for a lead to the Bishop and Sister agreed to contact Bishop Bootkowski. The Bishop recalled the statue being sent to The Sisters of Christian Charity in Mendham. When the nuns prepared to sell their property, they called the Bishop and informed him of the coming move and asked what to do. Armed with information from Bishop Bootkowski about the statue, Mary followed the trail that led her to its new and present home:

The Church of Saint Mary of the Assumption  
155 Washington Avenue, Elizabeth

The Case of the Missing Madonna: Solved. Good job, Mary, our super sleuth!

— Jean Kuras



MOTHER'S DAY, 1957

*The entire 8x10 photo of the Consecration of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of which the above is only the right side, was published in this newsletter a few years ago. It was just recently that Ms. Mary Stark was able to inform the HSOB of the statue's present whereabouts since it was placed on its pedestal overlooking the Garden State Parkway 51 years ago.*

*One of the purposes of this publication is to find the answers to so many of the puzzling gaps in our local history, many of which will probably remain forever lost. Let's hope that Ms. Stark's welcome information will start a new trend.*



## HOME OF BLOOMFIELD'S FIRST MAYOR

The old house illustrated here was formerly at 1442 Broad Street and was owned by the grandfather of Bloomfield Historian and artist, the late Herbert Fisher. George Fisher was Mayor of Bloomfield in 1904, the first under the new form of government that replaced the 1812 Town Committee system. This house, later demolished and replaced by a larger house, was sold to Philip Axt and became part of a golf range.

Herbert Fisher is well remembered for his excellent articles on Bloomfield History that appeared in the Independent Press between 1960 and 1963. All too many of the houses and other historic buildings he researched and illustrated have since been demolished, includ-

ing two 18th century Cadmus houses on the south side of Montgomery Street. His beautiful pen-and-ink drawings first appeared in the Independent Press as illustrations for his articles. Some of these, later hand-colored and framed, are owned by the Historical Society of Bloomfield and are displayed in their Museum.



General Joseph Bloomfield

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

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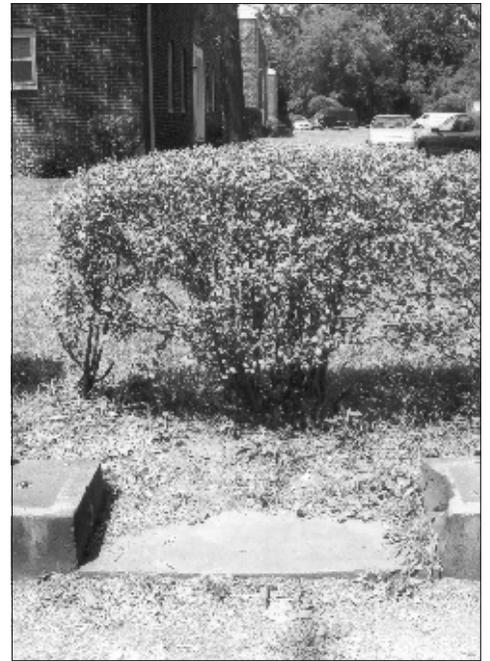
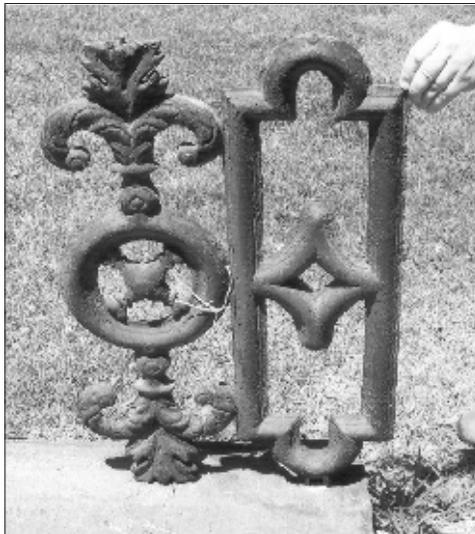
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Mary Wilbert

## The Old Cast-Iron Fence



This is a section of cast iron fence originally installed on the Belleville Avenue frontage of Thomas Oakes' property, possibly when the house was remodeled and enlarged in 1878. The house was razed in 1943, but the fence remained for a couple of years until broken up and carted away as scrap iron. One of these sections was stolen from the scrap heap and preserved in a Bloomfield attic for 25 years until it was given to the Museum of the Historical Society of Bloomfield. The brownstone coping on which it stood still remains in place.

The entrance to the estate is still marked by this opening in the brownstone coping. The marks of the iron posts that supported the fence can still be seen on either side. The unit of the garden apartments that replaced part of the house can be seen to the left. There was a fountain between the house and the street.

### 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.*

Erika D. Marshall (renewed),  
Bloomfield, NJ

Mimi and Edward Michalski,  
Bloomfield, NJ

### How To Join The HSOB

The Society welcomes anyone who has an interest in local history and who want to know more about it. Moreover, anyone below the legal voting age who wants to contribute to this newsletter is more than welcome to submit a manuscript to this Newsletter. Our address is: Historical Society of Bloomfield Museum, c/o Bloomfield Public Library, 90 Broad St., Bloomfield 07003.

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



Looking west toward Kennedy Drive (the Morris Canal until 1924), the brownstone coping can be seen still marking the line of the now vanished fence. The photographer's assistant holding the only surviving section of Thomas Oakes' fence is Frank Fabiano.



The Plaza Building at the corner of Washington Street and Lackawanna Place, built some-time in the 1920's and until recently the home of the Seven Hills Restaurant, has some colorful terracotta work around the entrance from the street to the second floor. The building is now gutted and awaits the wrecker's ball.