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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BLOOMFIELD

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BY INDUSTRY WE THRIVE: Educating Children In Early Nineteenth-Century New Jersey

By Kenneth Meyers

Monday Nov 17 At The Bloomfield Civic Center

"By Industry We Thrive: Educating Children in Early Nineteenth-Century New Jersey" currently on exhibit at the New Jersey Historical Society Museum in Newark, uses a wide range of books, pamphlets, broadsides, and manuscripts from the New Jersey Historical Society Library to explore the effects of rapid economic development on the lives of young people living in New Jersey in the first half of the nineteenth century. As societies change so do the skills they teach the young. Until the 1790s, New Jersey was an almost completely rural state with a total population of about 125,000 people, no cities, and few substantial towns. Because eighteenth-century New Jersey offered few young people much choice as to the kind of work they would pursue as adults, the kind of community they would live in, or the kind of person they would marry, parents, teachers, and other social leaders taught young people to distrust their own opinions and to accept their inherited place in a hierarchically organized and comparatively static society.

The New Jersey economy was transformed after 1790, when increased European demand for American agricultural products spurred expansion of the local transportation system and led to the rapid growth of several regional towns. By 1860, Trenton, Patterson, and Jersey City were small cities with populations of around 20,000, Newark was a major manufacturing center with a population of over 70,000, and New Jersey had become one of the most thickly settled states in the nation with a population of more than 900,000.

Economic development led to a revolution in child-rearing practices as both adults and young people realized that success in this more complex and competitive society depended on the acquisition of a wide range of increasingly important skills. Some of these skills were practical. As more

New Jerseyans became deeply involved in commerce, it became much more important for them to know how to read fluently, to write a clear hand, and to use numbers. But success in this brave new commercial world depended on the acquisition not only of practical skills, it also required the development of a fundamentally new conception of the individual and his or her relationship to the world. Where child-rearing practices in eighteenth-century New Jersey had encouraged deference and an acceptance of the existing order of things, child-rearing practices in nineteenth-century New Jersey began to promote the kinds of personal initiative and self-reliance which would enable young men and women to take fullest advantage of the new opportunities created by economic growth.

By Industry We Thrive is divided into three parts. The first uses eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century books and pamphlets to contrast older and emerging child-rearing practices.

Many of the works in this section were written by New Jersey ministers who believed that the young people were like wild animals who needed to learn to submit their wills to the superior wills of their parents. For example, in a 1780 sermon titled "Persons Possessing the Iniquities of Their Youth in After Life," the Hanover, New Jersey, minister Jacob Green warned "vain



R. G. H. de S.

and giddy" youth against the dangers of "wicked company" (specifically noting the unhappy fate of young women doomed to "solitary and neglected" lives because they got pregnant and bore an "illegitimate child in youth"), reminded the young of both sexes that God punished all children who disobeyed their parents, and emphasized the wisdom of the biblical injunction: "He that spareth the rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." (Proverbs 14.24) Other works in this section trace the gradual emergence of new child-rearing practices built on the sentimental notion of children as naturally innocent beings who were best taught by positive example rather



"Rise Youth Exhault Thyself & Me," Samuel Whelpley, *Compend of History From the Earliest Times* (NY: 1817).

than threats of physical or divine punishment. As the Scottish philosopher Hugh Blair put it in a late eighteenth-century sermon "On the Duties of the Young" reprinted in Morristown in 1812, wise parents did not try to break the will of their children, but prepared them for the trials of adulthood by inculcating the virtues of "moderation, vigilance, and self-government" which would enable them to navigate the opportunities and dangers of the expanding marketplace.

The second and largest section of the exhibition deals with schooling in the first half of the nineteenth-century and focuses on the three R's: reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Until the end of the eighteenth-century, most New Jerseyans learned to read by listening to their parents, employers, or ministers read from a handful of religious texts the most important of which were the Bible and their catechism. People who learned to read in this way were often incompletely literate in that they could read religious texts that they were familiar with but often stumbled when confronted with previously unknown works such as political pamphlets or newspapers. Moreover, while reading was taught in the home, writing was taught in school which meant that many people who were partially literate had little or no facility with the use of letters. This was especially true for women who had much more limited access to educational opportunities outside of the home. These educational patterns began to change in the last decades of the eighteenth-century when the beginning of rapid economic growth made printed materials more affordable while making it more important for young men and women to be able to read fluently, write a fair hand, and manipulate numbers.

Items exhibited in this section include a wide range of school books designed for students of all ages as well as numerous class-room exercises which show how students learned the lessons taught in their books. Among the most charming of these books are a group of books for children including an

alphabet book "A Was an Archer" published by Benjamin Olds of Newark and the quaintly illustrated "Cobwebs to Catch Flies; or Dialogues in Short Sentences, Adapted to Children From the Age of Three to Eight Years." Manuscripts in this section include copybooks kept by Joseph Beach of South Orange in which he practices his penmanship by

copies the moralism "A wise mind is diligent, industrious, studious. and religious," several short compositions by young girls taught by Beach's sister Phoebe, and some beautiful cypher-books in which young men and women recorded some of the numerous systems measurement employed in the various branches of nineteenth-century commerce.

The third and final section of the exhibition focuses on the lives of young people living in New Jersey's rapidly growing cities. Many nineteenth-century New Jerseyans thought of cities as places of both economic opportunity and moral danger. This was especially true for many older New Jerseyans who realized that the cities were attracting many poorly supervised young people who were busily creating the patterns and institutions of a distinctive youth culture. Away from the protecting confines of their parents home, young men and, less often, women could make their fortune but they could also fall prey to the allure of confidence-men or painted ladies or demon rum. Objects included in this section include advice books in which New Jersey ministers warn the young about the dangers of the city; the manuscript minutes of the Newark Young Men's Society in which ambitious clerks and mechanics prepared themselves for taking a leading role in the political life of their city and state by debating the great issues of the day including the abolition of slavery; and the records of the Newark Library Society which was founded in 1789 by young men who believed that self-education was the most reliable route to both moral probity and financial success.

The program will begin at 8 pm and admission is free. Come and bring a friend. Refreshments will be served afterwards.

A New Face For An Old Friend

Plans are well under construction for the preservation of Brookside Elementary School on Essex Ave.

Built in the 1890s, the fate of the building was questionable to the surrounding neighbors as the structure lay in disrepair for many years.

Just a ride by the property will show you how a little sandblasting can bring back the life of a building once headed for the wrecking ball. Plans are to convert the school into affordable condominiums while keeping the neighborhood's historic flavor.

Similar educational and industrial buildings in the area have been treated in the same fashion, giving these historic and architecturally distinctive structures of the past a new purpose while coming into the Twenty-First Century.

Hats off to progress!

NOT SO LONG AGO...IN BLOOMFIELD



A typical scene in Downtown Bloomfield. Can anyone date this picture taken at the corner of Washington Street and Glenwood Ave?

A Tribute To Richard Rozewski

I have known Richard Rozewski for 24 years. We first met at the Bloomfield Public Library attending a meeting of the Bloomfield Area Environment Action Group. I took my daughter, Vicki, a Girl Scout at age 14, for her Challenge of the Environmental badge. After Vicki completed the requirements for the badge, she asked to continue with the group. It was a rewarding experience for her, and she continued until she went off to college.

The BAEAG, as they were known, started a pilot program collecting newspapers door to door on Saturday mornings, then selling the papers to buy trees to plant in town. They also instituted a recycling program of glass and aluminum at the school administration building and later sold the idea to the town fathers so that Bloomfield had curbside pickup of recyclables before it was popular.

The group activities involved the

families; we went to zoning board meetings to limit high rise buildings in town and won, we tried to save the Dodd House and lost. We saved a tree on Belleville Avenue and it lived 20 more years.

McDonald's Restaurant in North Center does not have the tall arch because the group fought it as sight pollution. They raised additional money by having "Walk for Trees" through Bloomfield and Glen Ridge. There was Earth Day on the Green to heighten the town's awareness of our environment and the need to plant trees.

Richard worked diligently to put Bloomfield's Town Green and the surrounding area on the State Historic Register which established the Historic District of Bloomfield. The group prepared a luncheon at the Church on the Green, with a speaker from the state and later led house tours of the district.

Richard met with Jean Doswell Oakes and talked to her about saving her home for the town of Bloomfield. He later became a trustee of Jean Oakes' home now known as Oakeside Bloomfield Cultural Center, and we served on the board together. I remember the day he called to tell me that Oakeside had been nominated for a New Jersey Historic trust grant after three attempts and I cried. We had worked so hard and come such a long way together.

Doreen and Richard were married in Mrs. Oakes' garden room at Oakeside and I was privileged to be there.

Richard was taken from us too early, but he made a positive difference and we will miss him.

Sylvia Woolworth,
Bloomfield

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The Bloomfield Hose Co. No 2 was located on the corner of James and Broad Street.

The officers and members of the Historical Society of Bloomfield, New Jersey cordially invite you to join the society.

Six Reasons Why You Should Join The Historical Society Of Bloomfield:

1. Bring together those people interested in history, and especially in the history of Bloomfield and neighboring communities;
2. Discover and collect material which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the area;
3. Provide for the preservation of such material and for its accessibility for examination and study;
4. To undertake the preservation of historic buildings, monuments and markers;
5. Disseminate historical information by publication in newspapers or otherwise; and
6. Hold meetings with lectures, discussions and related activities for the benefit of members and the public.

If you are a current member of the Historical Society of Bloomfield, please remember dues are being collected in January. If you are not a member, but would like to be, please contact us at The Historical Society of Bloomfield, 90 Broad St., Bloomfield NJ 07003 Attn: membership Chairman. You may also want to sign up a friend interested in local history or preservation.