



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield
Celebrating 50 years: 1966-2016



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

October 2016

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, October 25, 2016

BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER

84 Broad Street,
Bloomfield, NJ
7:30 PM

The Native Americans of Essex County

Presented by Christopher Savio

The Historical Society of Bloomfield will present "The Native Americans of Essex County." New Jersey author Christopher Savio will discuss the indigenous peoples of New Jersey, and more specifically, Essex County. Savio is the author of



Native American History & Culture and *Abraham Lincoln & Sand Creek: Abraham Lincoln's Involvement & Native American Policies*, among several other books.

Savio teaches Native American history and culture in Glen Ridge, NJ and is the recipient of three National Endowment for the Humanities scholarships to study Native American History. He holds a BA and an MA with honors, both in American History. The event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

The Historic Ball House 288 Broad Street

Joseph Ball lived here during the American Revolution. His son, Isaac Ball, donated the first five acres of the Bloomfield Cemetery. The old Dutch oven still exists in the south wing unit of the house.



Image courtesy of Van Tassel Funeral Home. Photo by Richard Rockwell



The Ball House in 2013. Photo by Richard Rockwell

ON THE BANKS OF THE MORRIS CANAL

By Richard Rockwell

Edited by George Musser, Editor of *The Gaslamp*, the official newsletter of the Glen Ridge Historical Society

Tucked between Broad Street and John F. Kennedy Drive in Bloomfield, fenced off and unknown even to many long-time residents, is one of our area's most significant historical sites: The Collins House.

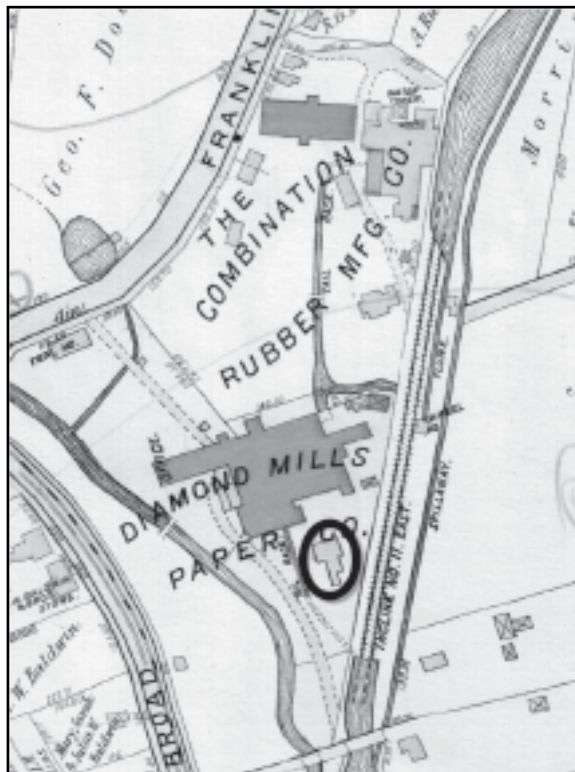
Few other local homes have survived from the 18th century, let alone one that played such a pivotal role in the operation of the Morris Canal, among the engineering marvels of its day. Though abandoned, dilapidated and vandalized, the house still retains much of its original fabric and its setting along the banks of Third River. Through the efforts of Bloomfield council member Carlos Pomares and Mayor Michael Venezia, the town covered it with tarps in 2014 and added roofing in 2015 to arrest its decline until those of us working to save the house can raise enough money to complete its restoration. Our efforts took a leap forward in November of 2015 when the house was officially added to the State Register of Historic Places.

Built around 1790 by John Collins, an immigrant from Ireland and a Revolutionary War veteran, the house is a rare surviving example of an architectural style called East Jersey Cottage, a hybrid of Dutch and English heavy timber framing. The style is distinguished by one and a half stories with a front gable

roof over a three-bay façade. In 1820, John's son, Isaac, built an addition in the same style. The house originally sat on 11 acres of farmland, but the area rapidly became industrialized. Third River—so named because it is the third tributary of the Passaic River, counting up from Newark Bay—provided hydropower for a string of mills. Part of the Collins property was flooded as a mill pond through much of the 1800s.

In 1824, Isaac Collins sold a little over two acres of his tract to the Morris Canal & Banking Company. It became the site of one of the canal's most remarkable features, Inclined Plane 11 East. Normally a canal uses locks to handle a change in elevation, but locks are practical only for rises or drops of about 10 feet, and the Morris Canal had to climb a total of 914 feet from Jersey City to its highest point near Lake Hopatcong. Instead, the canal relied on inclined planes. Inclined Plane 11 East—the 11th counting eastward from Lake Hopatcong—was designed by Bloomfield resident Ephraim Morris. His design won an

engineering competition and was awarded a patent. It even made the front page of *Scientific American* magazine. The system was essentially a giant cable car. It operated by water power from the canal itself. At the top,



Collins House (circled) on the 1906 Mueller Atlas. Today the inclined plane is J.F.K. Drive, Diamond Mills is Kinder Towers, Combination Rubber is a condo complex, and Franklin Avenue is Hoover Avenue. Inset from Google Maps.

Collins House in the 1960s. The right section dates to circa 1790, the left to 1820. Photo from Bloomfield Cultural Resource Survey, 1982.



The house today. The Township of Bloomfield has added a new roof to the main house and covered the remainder with tarps.

a flume channeled water into a plane house, where it spun a turbine that hoisted a cable up or down the slope. The boat rode on a flatbed cradle, and the trip lasted four minutes, ascending or descending 54 feet over a linear distance of 1,600 feet. The plane was much faster and more compact than an equivalent series of locks.

In addition to providing land for the canal, Isaac Collins and his son, John, were carpenters on the project. They built and maintained the plane as well as bridges, boats and aqueducts.

The family sold the house in 1891 to the adjacent paper mill. A succession of paper mills used the house as caretaker's quarters until the last, Marcal Paper Mills, sold the property to the Township of Bloomfield in 1981. A cultural resource survey determined the house to be historically significant, so the town kept it and sold the adjacent property for a senior residence, which became known as Kinder Towers.

The last Marcal caretaker, Ollie Kemp, and his wife lived in the house until 2004. After they moved out, the house was left empty and quickly deteriorated.

When the Morris Canal was abandoned in the 1920s, the town bought the right of way in hopes of building a high-speed trolley system. The transit system was never constructed and the land remained vacant until the

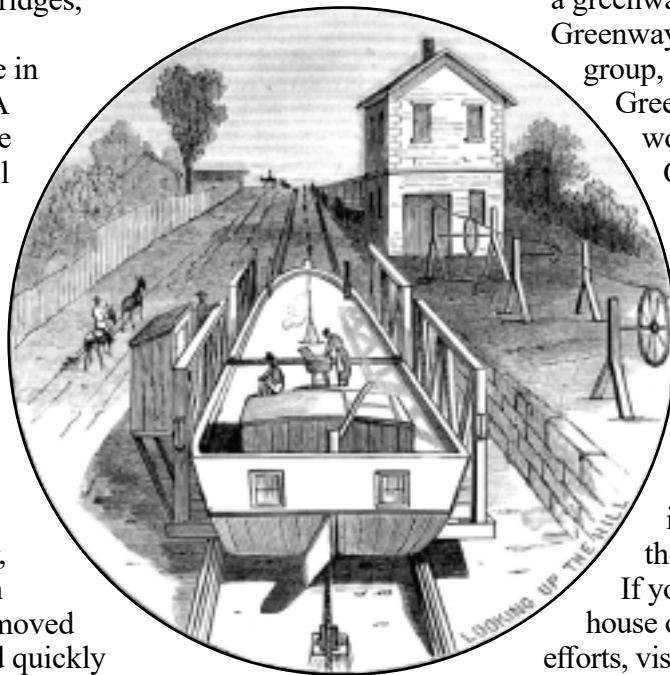
Below: Postcard from circa 1910 shows the foot of the inclined plane near the Baldwin Street bridge. The Collins House (arrow) is left of the bridge.



1950s, when it was used for the Morris Canal Highway, now J.F.K. Drive. The street

follows the path of the canal from Liberty Street to Hoover Avenue. The curves near Foley Field trace the original topographic contours, and the slope from Baldwin Street to Hoover Avenue was the site of the inclined plane.

The Bloomfield inclined plane, from Scientific American, May 20, 1882



Throughout the state, volunteers have organized to preserve what remains of the canal. In 2015, Bloomfield designated the path of the canal through the town as a greenway and formed the Morris Canal Greenway Committee. It and a nonprofit group, Friends of the Morris Canal Greenway in Bloomfield, have been working to stabilize and restore the Collins House. We hope to make it the centerpiece of the greenway in Bloomfield, with space for public meetings, exhibits and a caretaker's residence. In February, the state Department of Environmental Protection awarded the town a \$24,000 grant, which it plans to use for wayfinding signs and historical interpretive kiosks along the path of the canal, keeping the history alive.

If you'd like to learn more about the house or contribute to the preservation efforts, visit our website, Collins-House.org.

Richard Rockwell is the HSOB webmaster and a Board Trustee. He is also Chair of Bloomfield's Morris Canal Greenway Committee and author of Bloomfield Through Time (Fonthill Media, 2015). His next walking tour of the Morris Canal (Nov. 5) is fully booked. To sign up for the next tour, email MorrisCanal@gmail.com.



General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF BLOOMFIELD

PO Box 1074
Bloomfield, NJ 07003-1074

Tel: 973-743-8844

E-mail: info@hsob.org

www.hsob.org

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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:

Julia Alvarez
Bloomfield

John Gagliano
Bloomfield

Paul H. Beck
Yellow Springs, OH

Peter Mock & Holly Robertson
Bloomfield

Mary Fletcher
Bloomfield

Eric & Carley Storm
Bloomfield

Bloomfield Brain Buster

Solve this cryptogram by deciphering the transposed letters. The answer reveals a fun fact about our town. The solution will appear in the March 2017 issue of *The New Town Crier*, along with the names of the winners. Email solutions to HSOB1812@gmail.com

QZR KBJLTP ZBGPR BV NJBBOVLRJH, EZLKZ

DYRHUQRP QZR OBYLPL KUTUJ, LP BTR BV QZR

VRE YROULTLC RIUODJRP BV QZR RUPQ ARYPRM

KBQQUCR PQMJR BV UYKZLQRKQGYR LT QZR

GTLQRH PQUQRP.

Crowds turn out for the HSOB Attic Sale

The Historical Society of Bloomfield held its inaugural Attic Treasures Sale on Saturday, October 1. The threat of rain caused the sale to be held indoors in the Bloomfield Public Library Little Theater. Shoppers scooped up rare, vintage and antique items related to Bloomfield and surrounding areas. Curiosities, collectables, bibelots and bric-a-brac abounded at the sale, which was held to raise funds to support the HSOB. *Photo by Mark Scurman.*

