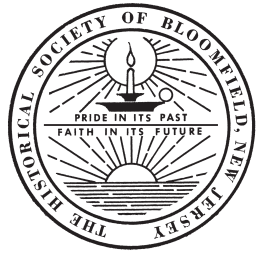




# The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

JANUARY 2006

## Save The Date

### NEXT MEETING

**TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2006**

This promises to be an exciting meeting, to be held at Oakeside Bloomfield Cultural Center

**Abraham Lincoln  
will be our guest speaker!!!**

## NEWS OF LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION

Of all of the hand-written documents that have been found that date from 1865, nothing written in the first person from Bloomfield about Lincoln's assassination had come to light before the text of this letter was found. And, for some reason, the writer (Mrs. Israel Currie Ward) relegates this exciting news to a second paragraph of her letter; putting family matters first (the birth of her first grandchild). Then she wrote:

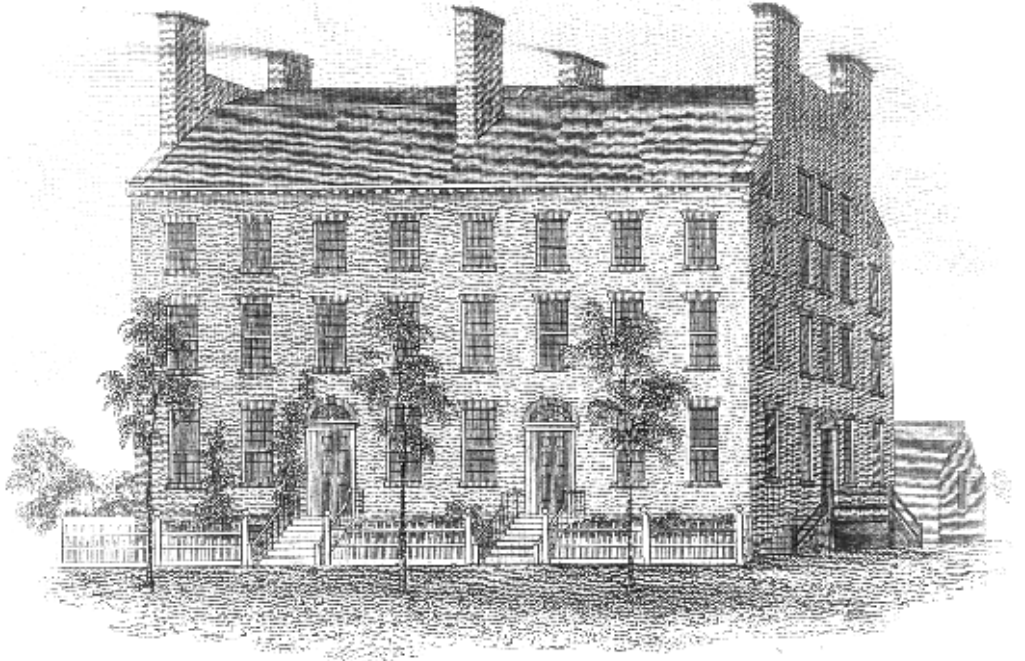
*"April 16, 1865*

*...but before our rejoicing had ceased to echo and reecho through every city, town and village in our farmed land, a most malignant assassin has committed a deed shocking and afflicting beyond description, which has drawn burning tears from the eyes of stout\* men and sent wailing and bitter lamentations through the Country!!! Today our church (The First Presbyterian) is draped with \$400.00 worth of black cloth belonging to the O[akes] Woolen Mill, owners, friends, and neighbors, and [on] many private dwellings, [there are] smaller badges of heart stricken sorrow."*

Through this, we can finally read at first-hand how the news of Lincoln's assassination was received in Bloomfield. As far as is known, there are no other written descriptions of the draping if the Church on the Green in black cloth. And although Mrs. Ward was an unworldly woman, she seems proud that the black and white mourning cloths on her front porch were visible from Broad Street, a good distance across The Green.

This spectacular expression of sorrow at the death of The President of the United States must have been photographed, but these pictures seem not to have survived or have yet to be discovered.

\*The original meaning of this word was "strong" rather than obese.



## BLOOMFIELD ACADEMY

The Bloomfield Academy was founded in 1807 by the Reverend Abel Jackson and members of the First Presbyterian Church. Through the enthusiasm of such men as Israel Crane, Joseph Davis, and General John Dodd, and all members of the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church, plans were made in June of 1807 for a survey of land purchased from Joseph Davis on which to "build an academy". Clay for bricks had been dug from the "Burying Ground" (now Bloomfield Cemetery) and trees felled in the area for lumber. The building was not completed until 1816. It had three stories, a basement, and an attic with gables north and south, as shown in the engraving.

The original roof was replaced in the 1870's by a massive Mansard roof, allowing space for another floor. It remains today, although the Victorian brackets and heavy cornice

*Continued on page 2*

## An Historic Visit



Miss Jean W. Oakes smiles as she displays a colorful silk necktie quilt originally give to her sister, Mrs. John Shepard Eells (Juliet Oakes) and made in Bloomfield by Mrs. George Hetzel.\* This in one of several items which Jean Oakes donated to our Museum during her recent visit. Other items include a framed photo of President McKinley and a sample of the woolen material used in making the suit worn at his inauguration in February, 1901; a piece of Oakes woolen material-Indigo Serge; a piece of Thomas Oakes and Company material given to Jack Eells for an overcoat; two photos of a window display in Lipton's store, one showing a lavender, green, and black plaid gown worn by Mrs. Sarah Van Liew Oakes, (sister of Thomas Oakes) and a wedding gown worn by Mrs. Harry Edward Richards (Helen Louise Van Liew, daughter of Sarah Oakes and wife of Dr. Richards) and the other showing an oval framed portrait of Mrs. Van Liew in one of the dresses in the photo in the display window of Lipton's Store on Broad Street.

Looking at this photo of Jean Oakes you will notice in the background a framed photo of Mrs. Van Liew wearing the same dress as the mannequin is shown in the recent gift received.

*Dorothy Johnson*

\*The 1933 Bloomfield Directory lists George W. Hetzel of 36 Lake Street as a weaver in Thomas Oake & Company. The Hetzel residence on the west side of Lake Street was replaced by Exit Ramp 148 of the Garden State Parkway in 1952.



*Bloomfield Academy (continued from page 1)*



**Phoebe Dodd Rundell**

shown in photographs of the 1870's were removed in the early 1950's when some much-needed repairs were carried out.

In 1844, the school came under the joint control of Warren S. Holt and James H. Rundell. Rundell bought the school a year later and operated it as a boarding school for boys until 1866. Then the German School of Newark purchased the property from Rundell in 1872.

For some reason, the Rundells seem to have fallen into the cracks of history. His photograph was not included in Doctor Harry E. Taylor's 1968 History of Bloomfield College, nor was it in the 1912 Folsom Centennial book or has it appeared in any other history of Bloomfield. It seemed to have been lost.

Then, just a few months ago, a file drawer was opened in the archives of the Historical Society of Bloomfield. There, among other documents, were these portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Rundell, which had

been donated to the Historical Society of Bloomfield in the 1960's by a descendant, the late Mrs. Grover C. Seymour of Upper Montclair.

The following obituary of Mr. Rundell [edited] was published in The Bloomfield Citizen on June 5, 1886:

*"To the list of Bloomfield's departed citizens, which has been increasing so rapidly of late, is now added the name of James H. Rundell, a notice of whose death was published in our last issue.*

*"Though not a native of Bloomfield, all his business interests were identified with the place. Here he first established himself in his profession, and when he withdrew from its practice he here spent the rest of his days in quiet retirement.*

*"Mr Rundell was born in Stillwater, N.Y. on the 29th day of March, 1814, being at the time of his death 72 years and two months old. He graduated from Union College at Schenectady in 1842...*

*"He came to Bloomfield as assistant to Rev. David A. Frame, who at that time was Principal of the Academy at the foot of the Green. He was probably introduced [here] by Reverend Ebenezer Seymour, pastor of the Presbyterian Church, and whose native place was the same as Doctor Rundell's.*

*"In 1846, Mr. Rundell married Miss Phoebe P. Dodd, daughter of Mr. Ira Dodd, who survives him..."*



**James H. Rundell**

If you would call upon the Rundells and the Seymours today, they can be found quietly resting in adjacent plots on Myrtle Drive "on the hill" in Bloomfield Cemetery. Nearby is the grave of another distinguished Bloomfield Educator: Charles Moreau Davis, proprietor of the Bloomfield Classical School\*.

In death, as in life, they seek the company of their peers.

*\*The school, a landmark that stood at the corner of Spruce and Liberty Streets, was demolished in the 1960's. Its massive carved walnut front doors, one of which has been beautifully restored by Harry Greenfield, are preserved in the Historical Society's Museum.*



## Westinghouse Revisited

The steel-framed and poured concrete buildings of the Westinghouse Corporation stood on both sides of Arlington Avenue. A Pantry Pride supermarket building on the left still functions as a discount store, but the rock-solid Westinghouse structures have vanished, along with the company itself. Watsessing Avenue is in the foreground. (Photo by Dorothy Johnson, 1967)



## Remember This?

There was a revival of the 1920's mania for miniature golf in the late 1940's. Some courses remain in operation today, but not this one. It was located next to the pre-Parkway Broadacres Golf Course at 1451 Broad Street, owned by Philip Axt. The site is now black-topped as part of the new Brookdale ShopRite parking lot. (Photo by Dorothy Johnson, 1967)



# MARY ARNY'S CHRISTMAS HYMN

A yellowed clipping from the Montclair Times dated December 21, 1955 describes a visit to the ruins of Bloomfield's Christian Interest house by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Arny of Montclair. This historic building, which used to stand near the corner of Watchung Avenue and Broad Street was demolished shortly thereafter. (An historical marker, erected by the Sesqui-centennial Committee of 1962, has also disappeared.)

A copy of the hymn with words by John Hart written in 1755 and melody composed by Mary Arny in 1955. The words were in a book found by Mrs. Arny in the ruins of the old Christian Interest house near the corner of Watchung Avenue and Broad Street in Bloomfield.

The couple found little of value in the ruins, vandals had seen to that, but among the rubble, Mrs. Mary Arny found a small pile of books, one of which was an old hymnal, and on the flyleaf was inscribed the name of Moses Sigler. This was of great interest to Mrs. Arny because Moses Sigler married Elizabeth Interest, daughter of Christian Interest, who had lived in the Arny's more than two-century-old home at 149 Watchung Avenue, which had been built in 1723 by Christian's wife's grandfather. The edition of the hymnal found by Mrs. Arny had been printed in Elizabeth Towne, and on the flyleaf, barely legible, were the letters "Ch—n—t—est".

The old book had words but no music, as was the custom of the time. Mrs. Arny liked one of the hymns and, with the help of her daughter, Katherine, picked out an appropriate tune on the piano to match the meter of the poem. Musicians who heard the melody liked it well enough to ask for copies and it was used at the nearby Watchung Presbyterian Church Christmas Pageant, presumably in 1955. (The church burned in 1974 and a new building has just been completed on the site.)

A half-century has passed since this discovery and it is hoped that Mary Arny's artifact is still preserved, possibly among the archives of the Montclair Historical Society.

The Garrabrant house, of the historical old Speertown (now Upper Montclair) houses still stands on Watchung Avenue, which was called Oak Tree Lane 200 years ago, near the present Grove Street. Stoutly constructed of stone, the original little one-story house about 25 feet square was built by Nicholas Garrabrant in 1723. Christian Interest – a cobbler who had recently immigrated from Germany, stopped by the Garrabrant home, his cobbler's kit on his back, to mend the family's shoes and to take orders for new ones. While there, he met and fell in love with the daughter of Peter Garrabrant, the son of Nicholas. The Intererst-Garrabrant wedding took place in the Dutch Reformed Church at Stone House Plains (now the Brookdale Section of Bloomfield). Interest was a conscript of the British, but he sided strongly with the Continentals. When the British were near Speertown, he was afraid they would discover who he was and draft him into their service again. To prevent this occurrence, he dug a deep cellar underneath his bedroom, and fitted it up with food, bedding, water, a keg of his own cider,



The Garrabrandt House. Perpendicular to the avenue and facing east is this very early home at 149 Watchung Avenue. Its first residents were Nicholas and Mary Garrabrandt. At the time of this photograph in 1865, the house belonged to Abraham Zeek, whose garden lies in the foreground. Local historian Mary Arny, who lived here for many years with her husband, Robert, wrote a book about their home called *Seasoned with Salt*.



A recent visit to 149 Watchung Avenue proved that the old Garrabrant house is still there, although Mr. and Mrs. Arny are no longer in residence. The house seems to be in good repair, but there was no sign of life and the old landmark had a gloomy look in the weak sunshine of an early spring afternoon.

A return visit in September confirmed the worst: the extensive property is "For Sale". Let's hope that this landmark will not go the way of the vanished Marlboro Inn just down the street.



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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Frederick Branch, Editor  
Pat Post, Assistant Editor  
John Gibson, Ad Hoc

#### ☞ 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.*

Harold Hubbell, Rowayton, CN  
Marvin Gruber, Fairlawn, NJ  
Ann Lewis, Little Falls, NJ

#### *Mary Army's Christmas Hymn* (continued from page 1)

candles, and so forth. Access to this secret room was gained by a carefully hidden trapdoor, which could be securely fastened from the inside.

Whenever there was a rumor that the redcoats were coming, Christian Interest would drop down into his secret hiding-place, and bolt the heavy trapdoor. By the aid of the subterfuge, he managed to escape the notice of the British during the Revolutionary War.

The Cellar and trap door in this old house are still in existence [in 1968] more than two centuries after the close of the Revolution.

*(The above history of the old brownstone house at 149 Watchung Avenue was adapted from an account, possibly written by Mary Travis Army, which appeared in the Montclair Centennial Book in 1968. Mr. and Mrs. Peter Army occupied the house at that time. Mrs. Army was also the co-author, with David Nelson Alloway, of "A Goodly Heritage: Montclair" in 1964 and was the author of "Red Lion Rampant", a history of Essex County.)*

## NEW BOARD & OFFICERS ELECTED

The Historical Society will be guided for the next two years by the newly elected Board and Officers. Thank you to a fine group of people who have accepted the responsibilities of leadership and service.

#### PRESIDENT

Jean Kuras

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*Membership*

Pat Post

*Preservation*

Pat Cavanaugh

*Hospitality*

Marlina Bua



*The late Harold Brotherhood (on the left) and Library Director and President of the Historical Society of Bloomfield, Kenneth McPherson, check out number 958 in an early photograph in the Museum. There is no date on the back of this early Polaroid shot, but it probably dates from about 1965. The item they are examining is obviously a sewing machine and an early contribution to the Museum. Mr. McPherson later became Director of the Morris County Library.*

## A NOTE TO DOROTHY JOHNSON

Dear Dorothy,

How fortunate the Historical Society has been to be the recipient of your generosity! Generosity of time and work and generosity of gifts.

You've guided the Society from its beginnings and helped set the course for its success. We've depended on your imagination, encouragement and ability to accomplish goals and move forward.

Your recent contribution of a printer is such a useful gift and has already been put to work. It is indeed another valuable piece of equipment in the museum.

On behalf of the Board and Membership, thank you for thinking of us in such a thoughtful way.

Sincerely,  
Jean

#### E-MAIL

The Historical Society of Bloomfield  
at:  
BloomfHist@aol.com  
OR CALL US  
at: 973-743-8844

#### HURRICANE DONATION

The Salvation Army Red Kettle made its appearance at the September meeting and Historical Society members responded with spirit and generosity. A check for \$75.00 was sent to help the victims of hurricane Katrina.