



# The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



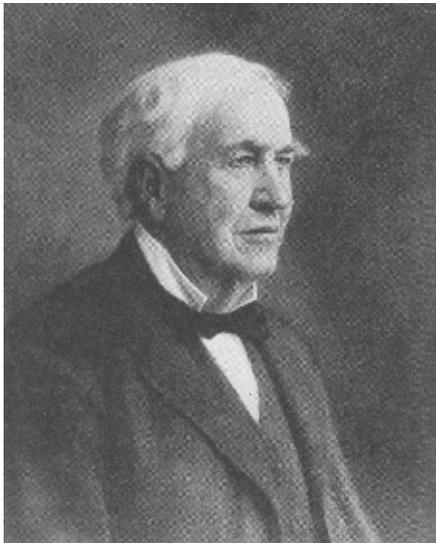
BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

MARCH 2007

## MEETING

TUESDAY, MARCH 27 – 8:00 PM  
at the  
BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER  
84 Broad Street, Bloomfield

### “Exploring Thomas Edison’s Silver Lake Property of Bloomfield and Belleville”



Among the many historic photographs preserved at Edison National Historic Site is a set of images dating from the 1910s taken in and around Silver Lake, the commercial and residential neighborhood on the border of Bloomfield and Belleville. About three miles from the Edison Laboratory, along the Erie Railroad Orange Branch, the inventor ran his Chemical Works plant at Silver Lake. Although seldom emphasized in history books, the Chemical Works played a key role in the manufacture of several Edison-invented products, like the nickel-alkaline storage battery and phonograph records.

Matching historic photographs to their present day locations, this presentation by Jerry Fabris, Museum Curator at Edison National Historic Site will show “then vs. now” comparisons of neighborhood change over the past 90 years. The photographs reveal a behind-the-scenes tour through the buildings and grounds of the Edison Chemical Works, a forgotten chapter of our industrial past.

Please join us for an interesting evening - and bring a friend!



Map of 1856

## Watsessing Park

A gift from former Bloomfield residents, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Boyne of Springfield, Virginia is a group of documents they found in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. Photocopies were made and contributed to the archives of the Museum.

Most Bloomfield residents are unaware that the extensive park, reaching from Bloomfield Avenue and Entrance 149 of the Garden State Parkway on the south east, extends as far west as Dodd Street in East Orange, and that it was once the bed of Lake Watsessing, a large but shallow mill pond that backed up from a dam at Bloomfield Avenue (Newark and Pompton Turnpike) and is thought to date from the very early 1800’s. The dam washed out in a flood in the early 1870’s, and because the mill on Franklin Street had been abandoned, it was not replaced. The resulting eyesore, acres of weeds and odiferous swamps, was a town problem. Even after the owners of the property decided to divide the land into building lots, problems arose because the surveyor botched the job and the new owners found that their property overlapped that bought by other purchasers. The problem was finally solved when the lakebed was taken over by Essex County.

An ancient landmark, dating from the days when this area was the domain of the Leni-Lenape “Indians” was a large mound thought to be a sacred place. When the European settler’s practicality overcame sentiment, the mound was leveled by the owner of the property on which it stood. It had been constructed of sand containing pottery, statuary, and other sacred objects made by the “Indians”. The sand was sold for building purposes; the whereabouts of the artifacts is unknown.”

From “Bloomfield, New Jersey, published by the Bloomfield Public Library in 1932: “The Baptistry of the First Baptist Church, organized by a meeting of 13 Baptists in 1851, were Willetts Pond (called “Randolph’s Pond” in the 1870’s), Watsessing Lake or the Morris Canal.

### Executive Board Not To Raise Dues

In these days of runaway inflation, there has to be somebody willing to be one of the first to say “hold, enough”. We believe the dues of our Historical Society to be the lowest in the State of New Jersey. In exchange for the fee of \$10.00 per year, the members receive a four-page 8½x14 printed newsletter five times per year. The “New Town Crier”, which won first prize from The League of Historical Societies for the best historical society publication in New Jersey in 2006, contains items of current announcements and notices of meeting and other events, illustrated historical articles about some obscure events in the town’s past that have never made it into our several published books on Bloomfield history, and a reader’s column where interesting responses to articles are published. Also, readers are encouraged to submit photographs and family histories for publication.



## THE DRY STONE WALL: A Forgotten Landmark

On March 22, 1890, the *Bloomfield Citizen* carried the following news item:

*“A County bridge fell down in this town last Friday. The most serious effect resulting from the calamity is the fact that the Board of Freeholders is busily engaged in repairing a structure that is a disgrace to a wealthy county. The bridge in question is a small wooden structure over Third River on James Street. The east end of it rested on the dry wall belonging to the Morris Canal Company. It was this wall that gave way and precipitated the bridge. James Street has recently become a street of considerable importance. It is the only road leading to Mt. Olivet Cemetery. The afternoon previous to the accident a large funeral passed over this bridge.”*

A follow-up about the bridge was printed on August 30, 1890:

*“The contract has been awarded for an iron bridge at James Street over the brook near the Canal, in place of the wooden one that fell down.”*

On November 15:

*“Work was begun on Monday, on the iron bridge across the brook at James Street near Broad Street.”*

And finally on December 13:

*“The Morris Canal intend to put up a new bridge over the canal at James Street, adjoining the iron bridge that was built by the County.”*

The New Jersey Bridge Company of Trenton, N.J. have [sic] completed the iron bridge over the brook on James Street, and it is

now open for travel. The bridge will be a great improvement for the residents on the east side of the canal.”

The wall had been built around 1825 when the Morris Canal Company solved the rather intricate problems confronting them at the point near Broad Street where it was necessary for their artificial body of water to cross over the existing Third River at a slightly higher level, making it necessary for them to build an aqueduct over the river where it turned south-east to form Oakes Pond and turn their waterway north-west toward the plane that would lift the canal barges to the next level of the canal. To separate these two bodies of water a dry stonewall was built by hand (as was the rest of the canal). To find this wall, was still in existence and still in use after almost 200 years was astonishing.

In this composite of three views taken earlier this year by Clayton Spencer, we can see the double span of the James Street Bridge on the right. The part that fell in 1890 and was replaced by Essex County (and replaced at least twice since then) is nearest to the camera; the part owned by the Canal Company is behind the small grove of trees just beyond. Far to the left is a glimpse of the Baldwin Street Bridge. Both of these bridges are only a block apart and are parallel to each other; perspective has been distorted by the joining of three different photographic prints, each taken from a slightly different point of view. The bed of the canal from right-to-left would have been behind the top of the wall, a space now occupied by Kennedy Drive.

This discovery was quite a surprise. The wall is not visible from Broad Street and unless a curious person (such as your editor) stops his car and looks for it, the wall will remain a forgotten landmark.



## MORE MORRIS CANAL

Is there any limit to the number of photographs that can be found of this long-defunct waterway? Is there any limit to the great interest shown in it by thousands of people who could not possibly remember when it was in operation? (1825-1924) Well, here's another snapshot, unpublished until now.

Preservation of at least part of the canal as a recreation facility was proposed in the early 1920's when it became obvious that the once busy artery of commerce, which hadn't made a profit since 1865, was not only obsolete, but a liability to the State. Nothing was done about saving even a short stretch as a boating and fishing site, so it was drained, and the dried up remnant of the canal that lay within its borders was purchased by the Town of Bloomfield. The towpaths, once trod by generations of mule teams, remained useful not only as pedestrian shortcuts between city streets, but also as bridle paths used by several livery stables. One was the “Pearl Brook Academy” at 18 East Passaic Avenue, a casualty of the Garden State Parkway. Another was the one shown here. The “Riley Riding Academy” at 235 Montgomery Street, as it was listed in the 1935 Bloomfield City Directory, became the “Bloomfield Riding Academy” in 1939 and was listed as “vacant” after 1941. It remained until construction of the GSP required its removal.

This 1948 photo was made looking north from Montgomery Street at the site of the lock and boat basin, long empty of water and filled in. At the extreme right-hand margin of the photo can be seen the iron bridge at Liberty Street, replaced by a Parkway bridge in the 1950's. A previous wooden bridge of the usual simple truss design favored by the Canal Company can be seen in an earlier view of this same scene, painted by Bloomfield artist Charles Warren Eaton in the early 1900's. The property in the foreground is now the site of the brick structure of the Sinisi Oil Company.



## THE HALLINAN BLOCK, by Eleanor Boyne

Timothy and Bridget Hallinan arrived in Bloomfield about 1875 from Newark, where he had operated a grocery store on the Canal. Timothy and Bridget purchased property, a little more than a ½ acre, on the north bank of the Morris Canal in March 1875. The previous owners were John Trautfetter, his wife, and Joseph Meinhard, and there is evidence that the store was in existence at the time of purchase. The property was in the vicinity of Bay Avenue and Hoover Avenue, where the Whitestone apartments now stand. The family lived on the property, and the business operated as a grocery (probably more of a general store supplying the canal barges) and a saloon.

In August of 1888, Timothy purchased the land on the northwest corner of Pitt and Broad Streets from Mary B. Pitt, the widow of John C. Pitt, and John Pitt's heirs. This amounted to about half the block. The family continued to live on the Incline Plane for the first few years, but by 1890 they were living "above the store". The address usually given was 378 Broad Street. The family consisted of Timothy

and Bridget, and children Mary Ann, Elizabeth, John, Thomas, Charles, Alice, Grace, and Luelle. Two daughters died in infancy.

Unfortunately, Timothy was not able to enjoy his rising success in the business world. He died in November 1892, and the property was inherited by his wife, Bridget. Under the management of Thomas and Charles, the businesses continued to thrive. Thomas was the proprietor of the Mansion House while Charlie managed the grocery, market, and bakery. About 1900, Bridget and her daughters moved to 29 Benson Street to a house they had built there. Thomas and Charles, for the time being, continued to live at 378 Broad. John chose a career as a salesman and would eventually marry and settle in Texas. Bridget transferred the property to Thomas and Charles in 1902, well before she died in 1917. Thomas died suddenly in 1920. Charles continued on his own until his death in 1935. The property remained in the family until it was sold to outside investors in the 1980's.



By 1932, 328 Broad is listed as a "vacant store", but the following year the property was taken over by John Ganser, who changed the name to "Ye Olde Tavern" and may have made these drastic alterations in the old building. New walls were extended out to the sidewalk and a large boxy second floor addition obscured the old Mansion House, although the peak of the original roof still looked out over the top. The large horse barn at the rear of the property was razed, a parking lot took its place, and it may have been at this time that two driveways leading to the rear were filled up with narrow stores. (As this article goes to press, further changes are being made to the Ganser additions: French doors are being installed on the Pitt Street side and the modernistic doorway of the 1930's is no more.)

## Winter Sports

A jolly group of Division and possibly Spring Street residents after a spirited snowball fight around 1920. Two of the combatants are wearing hats left over from World War One uniforms, one of whom is almost certainly James P. Barth, who served in France in the A.E.F. He was born in Bloomfield on March 15, 1898 and educated in the Bloomfield Schools.

Far to the left are the entrance gates to Mount Olivet Cemetery, still there today, although houses have since been built close to either side. The Barth family owned a florist business at 38 Division Street, which was called Barth Street until 1912. More about this interesting Bloomfield Family, some of whom were employed at the nearby Oakes Woolen Mill, will appear in the next (May) issue. Photo given to the Bloomfield Historical Society by Ed Steckewicz, President of the Nutley Historical Society. The elderly lady who is standing in the front row is almost certainly Johanna Barth, who is listed as the owner of the corner of Spring and Division Streets on an early map.





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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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.

Kathryn Murdoch, Bloomfield, NJ  
Matthew J. Murphy, Bloomfield, NJ  
David and Doris Murray, Bloomfield, NJ  
Liga Stam, Glen Ridge, 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:  
**BlomfHist@aol.com**  
OR CALL US AT: **973-743-8844**

## Farewell, Barbara

Issues One and Two of this publication (May and September, 2001) contained lead articles about the restoration of the 1909 Bloomfield Cemetery Gatehouse, which was then underway under the guidance of the Cemetery's Manager, Barbara Vydro. The results of this refurbishing, which included replacing the old battleship linoleum floors with oriental rugs (!), appeared in those issues, and the redecoration of her office in a style appropriate to the early 20th century.

Ever since then, Barbara has been both a valued personal friend and the willing source of much biographical information about the thousands of departed residents of Bloomfield who inhabit the 20 or so square acres under her care. She never seemed too busy to slide those heavy ledgers out of the large black safe in search of answers to the hundreds of questions this editor had about those buried in this historic ground.

Barbara started her well-earned retirement in December of 2006. She will be greatly missed.



## LETTERS TO THE HSOB

Dear Fred,

I was amused by the letter from Peter Wright in the September newsletter. I too lived on Beardsley Avenue, the first house from Grove Street. Our great play venue was the wooded lot across the street. And of course the playground on Floyd Avenue. We went to Carteret School...

"...My family is steeped in Bloomfield history. My grandfather wrote an article for [the 1932 book] "Bloomfield, New Jersey" and edited "Bloomfield Old And New", writing the chapters of the early days. Rev. Joseph Folsom was secretary to The New Jersey Historical Society. He spoke at the dedication of the boulder and tablet at the end of The Green to honor General Bloomfield. This was in 1932. He mentioned [in his speech] that the town was his birthplace and exhibited a book from Governor Bloomfield's library with his bookplate and autograph on the inside cover. (I remember as a child going to the Bloomfield Cemetery at Christmas to put a grave blanket on the Folsom plot...)"

Mrs. Reilly then quotes Joseph Folsom:

*"Bloomfield, thy happy-omen'd name  
Ensures continuance to thy fame;  
Both Sense and truth this verdict give,  
While fields shall bloom, thy name shall live."*

*Written by Henry Kirke White, poet, to celebrate the fame of a brother poet and can apply with equal homage to our town of the same name. J.F. Folsom, May, 1918.*

Sincerely, Marilyn Beers Reilly  
October 30, 2006"



### IN MEMORIAM

Family, friends, neighbors, associates, and former athletes gather outside Immaculate Conception Church in Franklin, New Jersey, on January 27th after a memorial service for John A. Gibson, Sr. Almost two hundred people attended the service. John was a former Olympian and Bloomfield resident. (See "Bloomfield Revisited" pg. 18)