



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter Of The Historical Society Of Bloomfield



VOLUME TWO, NUMBER FOUR

BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY, 07003

SEPTEMBER, 2002

SEPTEMBER MEETING: "A DELIGHTFUL RECREATION" Thomas Jefferson and Music

Monday, Sept. 23 • 8pm
at Oakeside Cultural Center
240 Belleville Ave., Blfd

The Historical Society of Bloomfield is hosting "Mr. Jefferson and His Music" and invites its members and the public to attend what promises to be a very special event on September 23, 2002, at Oakeside in Bloomfield.

Paul Somers, a reviewer for "Classical N.J. Society Journal" said in a recent review that John Burkhalter, playing recorders, and Eugene Roan the harpsichord, "amply revealed, in their expertly played and constructed program, there was plenty of well-made music in 18th C. America."

This special opportunity to hear more about T. Jefferson and music, and the musical sound of the 18th Century has been made possible by the Horizons Speaker Bureau, a branch of the N.J. Council for the Humanities.



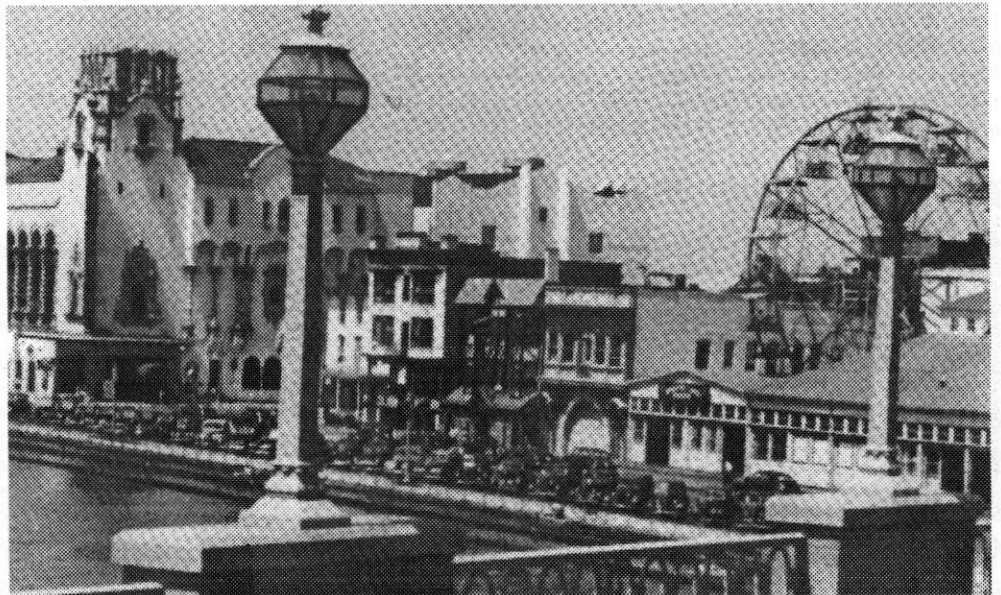
John Burkhalter, playing recorder, and Eugene Roan on the harpsichord will be guests of the Bloomfield Historical Society in September.

President's Message

As the Society continues its dedication to Bloomfield History, I am pleased to say that we are making good use of 21st Century technology. In the Museum we have a FAX and photocopy machine to facilitate communication. Our Computer is connected to the Internet so we can search information and send/receive E-mail: BLOOMFHIST@aol.com and our telephone (973-566-6220) has an Answering Machine.

Dorothy Johnson, our Curator, has been the motivating force for these innovations, Frederick Branch gave us the printer for the computer, and Dorothy E. Johnson, donated a scanner. Richard Lamb has volunteered his expertise to help us get operational. Patricia Cavanaugh, a computer-literate Trustee, has been helping us make use of the system. Among the plans for the future is the creation of a Website.

Ina Campbell, President



A view from the terrace of the gigantic Casino looking over Wesley Lake toward, from left to right, The Spanish Renaissance Mayfair Theatre, with real chimes in the tower, three old buildings from the previous century, and the barn-like Palace Amusements, with a Fun House, Ferris Wheel, and a Merry-Go-Round which had a pipe organ that wheezed out popular tunes from the 1920's, accompanied by thumping drums, whistles and crashing cymbals, all created by compressed air and a roll of paper with punched slots.

The Ferris Wheel, which could be seen for miles out at sea, was named after the man who invented it back in the 1880's. Asbury Park was probably the oldest such wheel, having been built in 1887, six years before the giant at the World's Columbian Exposition. We think this photograph was taken just before World War Two. None of the buildings shown exist today, and the Ferris Wheel has been dismantled and moved to a Mississippi amusement park.

Prudential Excursions To BLOOMFIELD-BY-THE-SEA (also known as Asbury Park)

By James Richard Branch
and Frederick Branch

How well we remember the Prudential Excursions to Asbury Park! They took place in the 1930's and, as we understand it, were intended to bolster Asbury Park's economy during the Great Depression, and were also of benefit to the Pennsylvania and New Jersey Central Railroads.

You've probably already realized that this is not an article about the history of Bloomfield, but we're willing to bet that a lot of Bloomfielders were on that train when it pulled out of Newark for a day of fun and games on the rides and the boardwalk. The five Branches (none of whom worked for Prudential) and Miss Emily Heath, our aunt who did, had a memorable day, second only to Christmas.

There was a gimmick: every Prudential employee got a free ticket which had to be turned in if they were to be paid for the day, which was usually a Wednesday. And some of Emily's fellow employees had other plans for the day, or simply gave up their tickets so we could have a good time. People were like that during The Depression.

We boarded the train at either the Central Railroad Station on Broad Street or at the new Pennsylvania Station on Market Street. What a train! It must have had fifteen cars and two locomotives and it was packed. The train was just for us: it raced through the stations along the right-of-way as though they weren't there, with its puffing engine headed for ASBURY PARK. We felt very important, looking at the poor people standing by the tracks lost in a cloud of cinders and dust; probably wondering what it was all about.

However, we finally arrived at the Asbury Park station, got off the train, and headed down Asbury Avenue toward the ocean. All you could smell was saltwater: it was heavenly!! We didn't think we'd ever get to the boardwalk but, when we did, we took in the glorious sight of all that

sand, sunshine and ocean with the waves splashing on the shore.

The first order of the day were swims in the pool (called the Natatorium) and the ocean. You could rent a swimsuit and bathhouse for the day for 50 cents or so. The suits were made of thick wool and, when they got wet, they weighed a "ton" and itched like the devil. We changed our clothes in a little room just big enough to turn around in. They gave you a key with a leather loop on it. If you lost it there was a charge . . . we never lost ours.

How well we remember the many amusements, and the booth with the sand sculpture right on the beach, where you could toss in your pennies and make a wish, the 5¢ all-you-could-drink sodas and the miniature golf courses. We almost forgot the "bumper cars" - those little cars that you could drive and what fun we had smashing into each other. Some of those kids grew up thinking that was the way everybody was supposed to drive. We spent a lot of time and money on those.

We almost forgot to mention the saltwater taffy, and those fascinating machines that "pulled" the globs of taffy were, to these kids, awesome. We later wondered what happened to the flies that got stuck on it. Of course, everybody had to buy a box of taffy to take home.

On the north end of the boardwalk was Convention Hall, with its many games of chance, the hot dog and hamburger stands, and the plush Paramount Theatre with its first-run features. Money being so tight, we couldn't afford the prices of the tickets. Besides, we could go to The Royal anytime for a quarter. And, on the south end, was the Casino, with more games, snacks, and a merry-go-round. And, oh yes, the endless rows of skiball machines.

To the west, on Wesley Lake, was the Fun House Building. Their merry-go-round had the rings you grabbed as you flew by, then tossed

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Letters To The Editor

Mr. Thomas P. Higgins Ph.D. of New Jersey, one of the seven grandchildren of Edward and Katherine Croughan, was kind enough to write to me to correct several pieces of information in the previous *Town Crier's* article on the Croughan house and family at 29 Oak Street. Mr. Higgins granted us his permission to print his informative and interesting letter, but wants the readers to keep in mind that much of the information is oral history, and no written records survive. So that you might have a better understanding of Mr. Higgins' letter, it would be best if you reread your "Croughan" article from the previous issue of *The New Town Crier* (copies can be obtained at the Historical Society Museum or by writing to Fred Branch, 28 Forest Drive, Bloomfield). I am sure that you will enjoy reading it, as it is filled with more interesting (and quite personal) Croughan family history. We are grateful to Mr. Higgins for correcting previous beliefs regarding the Croughan family history and for pointing out additional interesting information. And now for the letter . . .

Patricia Post



Croughan Descendent Remarks on Last Issue's Article

Dear Ms. Post,

I read, with a great deal of interest, your article about "The Croughan House." I am one of seven grandchildren of Edward and Katherine Croughan, and nephew of Donald and Ruth Croughan.

The porch was added long before the 1920's. I have a picture, dated 1911, of my mother and her sister, Dorothy, standing by the porch. Where the driveway is now there was a wisteria arbor on the side of the house, and the driveway was added after my grandmother died in 1962. The bathroom was modernized during the 1960's, and a large window became the small one that it is now. All the Croughans were not recent Irish immigrants when the property was purchased. Some of the family was here as early as 1763. They were poor, not middle class, believe me on that one! The dining room extension was added well before the 1920's, as my mother, who was born in 1909, remembers playing in it as a young girl. The stained glass window, popular in the late 1800's, is another clue that this addition was made well before the 1920's.

At one time the front room was used as a tavern/ inn. When the living room was refloored in the 1960's, pipes were found going down into the basement. These were for the beer kegs used in the tavern.

When the lot next door was sold by my Uncle John without telling the family, my usually kind and gentle grandmother, threw him and his belongings out into the street. He passed away in 1934.

From pictures I have seen of 29 Oak St., there were few decorative details on the house. It was always quite plain. Old tombstones were used as walkways from the back cellar door. I don't know if they are still there, but they were placed there when the remains of some family members were moved from a cemetery in Newark to one in Bloomfield. The writing on the stones was well-preserved, as they were placed facedown.

The fireplaces were always covered over; at least from the advent of central heating, but there were red bricks behind the gas stove in the kitchen (as well as a mantel), and a mantel in the living room, up to the 1960's. The small room you now use as a computer room was always my Uncle Donald's. He worked in NYC for the Woolworth Co. for 44 years! My grandfather worked in various fields, winding up as a security officer at the GM plant, and he was born and died in the same room of 29 Oak St.

Martin Croughan made his way out to Wisconsin as a homesteader. His descendants still live there on the original homestead. I met them in August of 1998.

The man who placed the siding on the house may have removed the old wooden shingles, because he did our home in East Brunswick, and removed the old shingles. But beware! Who knows!

I hope that you enjoy the house, as we all have fond memories of it. There are very few family members living in Bloomfield now, and as time passes, even fewer will remain.

Sincerely yours,
Thomas Croughan-Higgins

OBITUARY

The *New Town Crier* notes, with great regret, the death on May 23, 2002, of Barbara Russell in her 87th year. Miss Russell, who was the granddaughter of realtor, Nathan Russell, had generously given many photographs from her grandfather's business to the archives of the Glen Ridge and Bloomfield Historical Societies. These valuable documents showing existing and long-vanished buildings were of great value to historians and sometimes the present owners of these houses. Barbara has contributed much to our heritage. She was buried in Bloomfield Cemetery with her grandparents, parents and her brother, Arthur, who died in 1967.

A Forgotten Place Remembering the "Devil's Pot"

Every town has them. Those places that, because of time or circumstance, have passed into the back water of memory. One such place in Bloomfield was "Devil's Pot." If you grew up in the vicinity of Almira St. in the 1930's and 40's, you knew about "Devil's Pot." It was a pool of water that, even in the coldest of winters, never froze. Now, there was a perfectly good reason for this, but the "mysterious" is always more intriguing – which probably led to the name, "Devil's Pot."

The way to "Devil's Pot" was from to the foot of Almira St. down the earthen ramp that crossed the canal bed and then down the other side of the tow path. You were there! On one side, it was shielded from the tow path by trees; but on the other three sides, it opened out to the trees and reeds of the "swamp," a place of mystery and adventure.

The activities at the "Pot" were many and varied. You could throw stones into the water to your heart's content; 'til your arm fell off, if you were of a mind to. But most kids opted for the "skill" approach – toss a piece of cattail reed onto the water and see if you could hit it. Sometimes the neighborhood kids would go home and raid their cellars or garages for shovels. Then they

would gather at "Devil's Pot" and dig ditches, erect dams and form wondrous hydraulic projects. All of this activity would take a good part of the day and they would arrive home dirty and tired. The projects would last until the next rain storm when the gravelly soil would wash away and leave a clean slate for another time.

If you grew tired of the "Pot," you could then go out into the aforementioned "swamps." There was a path to some trees that were further out and you could get there without risking a "soaker" (a wet foot). Frogs, birds, turtles and an occasional snake might also be seen. If you were of the more adventurous type, you could try to find your own way into another part of the "swamp," but there was a greater risk of a "soaker" when you did this.

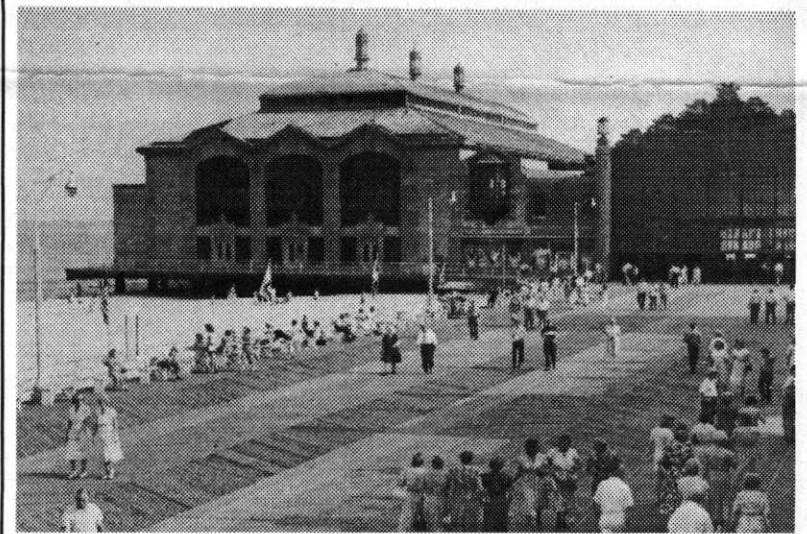
For many of the kids of that era, the "Pot" was a place that they remembered long after they reached adulthood. But time brings changes and "Devil's Pot" is seen no more. Now, to paraphrase some lines from a poem of another century:

"A baseball diamond sits
Over the spot
Where ol' "Devil's Pot"
Lies filled and fergot."

—John Gibson, Jr.

There are firemen marching in the 1912 Centennial Parade carrying bunches of flowers. When a fireman was asked if the men would be willing to do the same in 2012, the answer was an emphatic negative.

BLOOMFIELD-BY-THE-SEA...



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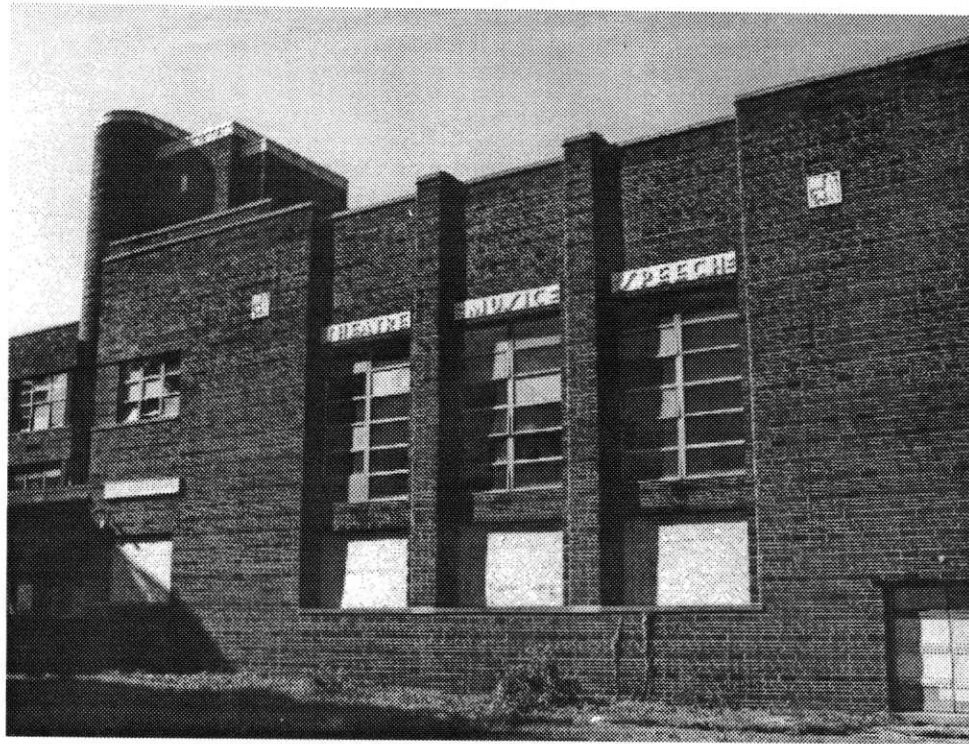
into the large bin on the opposite side (a free ride if the ring you got was brass). Against the far wall was the Ghost House, with the rolling barrel that you could walk through (or could pass around if you were faint at heart). And who could forget the man in the booth who pushed the button for the air to blow up the ladies' skirts. He wouldn't have much pushing to do these days.

Last, but not least, there was the Ferris Wheel and, during those days, the flag-pole sitter. We always wondered just how he got way up there and how he did his thing. A few doors to the west was another "plush" theatre: "The Mayfair," which also showed first-run movies, and boasted "Air Conditioned, 20 degrees cooler inside." On the lake side of the street were the motorboats. How we* loved riding in them. And, of course, the Swan Ride, which was a ride around the lake in a swan-shaped boat.

But, alas, those days are gone. Years later Betty and Richard would take their own children to the boardwalk and they have their own wonderful memories of it as well. Unfortunately, the Prudential Excursions were a casualty of World War II and Asbury Park, after many years of deterioration, isn't what it used to be, (although from some pictures I have seen, it has started to recover). Our many wonderful memories of magical days at the Asbury Park Boardwalk and the fun we had there, in spite of the Great Depression, will stay with us forever.

*N.B. from Fred. "Speak for yourself, Richard, I hated the damn things!"

As the dual authorship suggests, this reminiscence is the joint effort of James Richard Branch and his brother, Fred, who also happens to be the editor of this newsletter. It was supposed to be Richard's article, but somehow, Fred got involved. Letters went to and from Sarasota and Bloomfield. Fine points were hashed out by telephone, and the above is as accurate as two one-time kid brothers can make it. Both loved Asbury Park and were saddened when it was deliberately destroyed. This article is a tribute to their favorite shore resort "as she was."



Exterior photo of Bloomfield (South) Junior High School as it appears today. Photo by Richard McClelland.

EDITORIAL

Although never a student at the Junior High School, (our 9th grade classes were the last in the Senior High), your editor saw its steel girders rising among the trees from the windows of Mr. William Murphy's eighth grade in Fairview School. Its construction coincided with so many things. The modernistic architecture was similar to that of the 1939-40 New York World's Fair ("The World of Tomorrow"), which marked an end to the decade-old Depression and world peace as we had known it from birth. It was both a beginning and an end, although nobody knew it at the time. We went on to the old Senior High School with hardly a look backward to the 1899 red brick building that had seen us through from Kindergarten with dear old Miss Pratt.

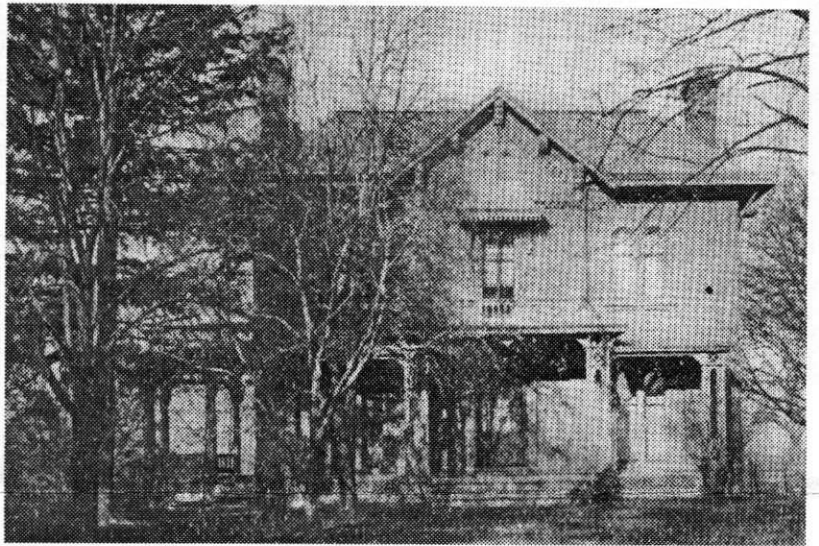
As for the Junior High School, it seems hardly possible that a brand-new modern building could be so neglected and abused. Hopefully, like Brookside School, it will be rebuilt for another purpose and its Modernist exterior stand as a landmark for years to come.

-Frederick Branch

The opinions expressed in this editorial do not necessarily reflect any official position of the Historical Society of Bloomfield, but are strictly those of the editor of this newsletter, Frederick Branch.



The Auditorium of the Junior High School slowly deteriorates from neglect and vandalism. Photo by Richard McClelland.



Before the Junior High School was the Richards house. It was from the spacious piazza on the left from which a fireworks display entertained Mr. Willard Richards' distinguished guests as reported in *The Bloomfield Citizen* the Saturday following the Fourth of July of 1891. The land behind the house sloped down to Newark Avenue (as it does today), but cracked black asphalt and weeds have replaced the clipped green lawn of 1902, which existed when this photo was published.

The Richards house stood just about where the main entrance of the 1939 Junior High is located in the contemporary photo (top left). Exactly a century separates both pictures, yet they represent societies that are a thousand years apart in how they perceived everyday life and in their sense of values.

Bloomfield Junior High School Memories

It was not a dark and stormy night when I first realized that the next year I would attend Bloomfield Junior High School . . . that huge building at the bottom of our hill. I know my parents built our house where they did so we could walk there and to Fairview School. In fact, it dawned on me at Fairview School on a beautiful spring day while having a game of softball on the playground. This game was different because we were playing Center School girls. I remember we played hard, and with help from Arlene Kierstead we did the best we could. Through this first encounter with real competition, we also realized that a lot of girls from Center School seemed very nice. I particularly remember Joanna Harris from that day. Our little world was about to expand.

So after the game, and as that school ended, we said our good-byes to our wonderful teachers. To this day I remember every one of them. This includes Mr. Jack Scially who I frequently see at the Bloomfield Library. By the way, he still looks the same as he did when he was my

fifth grade teacher. And so, a very happy early childhood ended, and we prepared to take the giant steps necessary to go to that large modern building that had room for all the kids in town. I couldn't wait.

From the first day I entered, I was fascinated by the mile-long corridors, turns in the hallways and huge windows. It was so exciting to go to different classrooms on different floors with so many different teachers. We had such fine teachers for all our academic subjects. I particularly remember, Mr. Bob Bannon, our Latin Teacher, who instilled a love of language that endures until today. Unfortunately, my only memory of Algebra class is falling off the chair.

In addition to all the academics, we had so many wonderful opportunities. We had our own wonderful library where we learned library science. The auditorium was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. The combination of lots of light on beautiful wood and what seemed like velvet seats was really elegant. It was during a choral rehearsal that I learned about my musical talent.

Since I always loved music, I always thought I could sing! Mr. Ralph Diller, the Choral Director, must have noticed both my enthusiasm and my concomitant inability to hit a note. He told me I could be in the program but to "please just mouth the words." I was so thrilled to be in that beautiful place that I was happy to do my part. In fact, I still love music, and I'm very content to be a listener.

We learned typing, sewing and cooking; the latter in a kitchen filled with many stoves. Our teacher, Miss Trenkle, took the class to the Acme that had been on Franklin Street. She taught us how to pick the best produce. We joined a club that Mrs. Crandell had and we learned how to prepare and serve food at social functions. We even left the school grounds to do this. So many of the skills acquired during these activities have stayed with us.

Finally, I remember the gym program. I remember the trampoline and rings where you could soar through the air. The energy and enthusiasm were boundless. Whoever even gave a thought to

what would happen if you lost your grip? Several years ago, Beth Peloubet reminded me that she remembers me with my royal blue one-piece gym suit with my hand up in the air leading all the students to Wright's Field. I do remember many wonderful games of field hockey.

I am indeed grateful for my education in Bloomfield Schools. I learned, worked, had fun and became friends with children from different races, religions and nationalities. What greater preparation for real life! During the month before I was asked to write this story, I met Mr. Jack Scially in the library, spent a day with Joanna Harris Fribush in Manhattan, talked to Beth Peloubet Crandell about meeting soon. I also had a similar conversation with Arlene Kierstead.

Oh, yes, one other lesson I learned early was that friendship is so much more important than winning . . . neither Joanna nor I can remember who won that hard-fought game at Fairview School so many years ago.

Mary-Jean Thompson Monahan



General Joseph Bloomfield
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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 you will take note of our many activities and participate in any that you may choose.

Wayne & Jane Bond
 Bloomfield, NJ

Ms. Irene Hall
 Discovery Charter School
 Newark, NJ

Mr. William Icklan
 Montclair, NJ

Ms. Doris W. Klein
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Mr. & Mrs. Richard Lamb
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Ms. Barbara Westergard
 Princeton, NJ

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 of Bloomfield at:
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 or call us at: 973-566-6220

In The News...

ALAN SLAUGHTER

Mr. Alan R. Slaughter, a resident of the historic Hall House on Oakland Avenue and Trustee of the Historical Society of Bloomfield, has been appointed as a Trustee of the New Jersey Historic Trust. Alan is also a member of the Bloomfield Historic District Review Board and has received an award for a 1999 Historic Preservation project, a 1999 Golden Trowel Award from the International Masonry Institute and a Merit Award from the United States Department of Transportation in 2000.

2002 SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

The Historical Society presented two scholarship awards to students who showed a special interest in history throughout high school. The recipients were Leah Piza, Class President, and Brendan Hughes, who previously prepared the printed booklet "Historical Trails of Bloomfield, New Jersey," as an Eagle Scout project.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

The Historical Society of Bloomfield is joining other Historical Societies in seeking to build a record of reactions and reminiscences of September 11 from local residents in each area. Of special interest is information on where you were when you heard the news of the terrorist attack. If you were one of the commuters trying to escape the city on that horror-day, your first-hand account of what you saw and how you were involved would be important information for the Archive.

The Museum has set up a file. Please send your stories to The Historical Society at 90 Broad Street, Bloomfield, N.J. 07003

A long forgotten landmark was quietly demolished to build the large store which housed Rickel's Building Supply until recently. Known as The International Arms and Fuze Company, it produced arms and ammunition for World War One. The building was later occupied by Star Electric Company and Charms Candy Company.

Alexander Williams' Poem

The following original poem was composed by the late Alexander Williams, who lived at 46 Woodland Road from 1923 until his death several years ago. It was sent to this editor in 1992 by mutual friend, Aldo Tron, of 125 Belleville Avenue. Aldo Tron was the son of Professor John Tron, a minister of the Italian Presbyterian Church, who was appointed a Professor of Romance Languages at Bloomfield College in 1926. A photograph of Aldo, taken around 1930, appears on page 88 of "Images of America: Bloomfield", published in 2001 by Arcadia.

Alexander's poem was first printed by the Christian Science Monitor around 1989. It is still timely and it is with their kind permission that we reprint it here:

"I think that I shall never see
 A billboard lovely as a tree.
 In fact, unless the billboards fall,
 I may not see a tree at all."

Ogden Nash

Mr. Williams continues:

"A tree who may in summer wear
 Her best attire, for all they care.
 Who line the highway left and right
 With mankind's most persistent blight.

A tree whose autumn tresses hide
 Behind those monsters as we ride
 Or worse, where once she proudly grew
 This callous wall commands our view.

Rhymes were made by you and me
 But trees were meant for us to see.

I now propose a toast to all
 In hopes that all the billboards fall
 With one resounding mighty crash
 Which ought to please our Mr. Nash."

—Alexander Williams

Looking Back At Bloomfield



The Bay Avenue Bridge at Brookside Park as it appeared in 1908. From "Images Of Bloomfield."