



The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

May 2017

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, May 23, 2017

7:30 PM

VAN FOSSAN THEATRE
(Bloomfield College)

449 Franklin Street

Bloomfield, NJ

**The Story of the Morris Canal
in Bloomfield:**

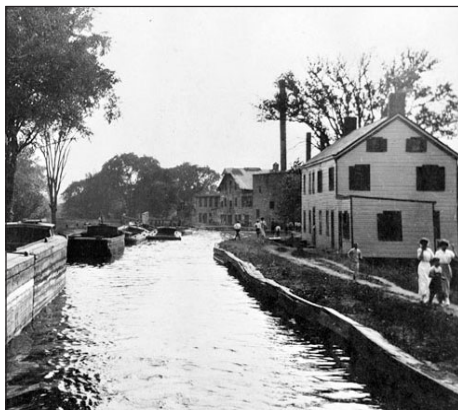
**From its Heyday as Freight
Transportation System**

to Modern Urban Greenway

Presented by Richard Rockwell

This presentation tells the story of how Bloomfield went from a small village with river-powered mills to an industrial center employing thousands of people to a desirable urban transit center and how the Morris Canal played a role in that story. Additionally, the program will explore how, in our current urban environment, we are developing recreational trails connecting to the Statewide Morris Canal Greenway project.

PLEASE NOTE: NO parking in bank lot directly across the street from the Theatre.



*Combination Rubber:
One of the many factories on the
Morris Canal in Bloomfield.*

MEMORIAL DAY IS MAY 29...



Remembering The First World War: The 100 Year Anniversary of U.S. Entry

On April 6, 1917, two days after the U.S. Senate voted 82 to 6 to declare war against Germany, the U.S. House of Representatives endorsed the decision by a vote of 373 to 50, and the United States formally entered **World War I**, also known as “**The Great War.**”

How did involvement in WW1 affect Bloomfield and its citizens? Not to mention the **Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919**, which killed more people globally than the Great War, at somewhere between 20 and 40 million people? Explore these topics at the October 24 HSOB meeting, presented by lifetime Bloomfield resident

Dean Cole. Stay tuned for more details by visiting www.HSOB.com.

Above: Sgt. Irving J.C. Olstrum, Company E, 312th Infantry, was killed in the Battle of the Argonne Forest on September 26, 1918 and was buried with full military honors. He rendered such distinguished service on the battlefield as to receive the mention for a commission as lieutenant, whose duties he was performing as he led his platoon into battle. Olstrum lived on 22 Lawrence Street and was 22 years old when he died.

HSOB TO HOLD 2ND ANNUAL ICE CREAM SOCIAL

After last year’s amazing turnout, The Historical Society of Bloomfield will be holding its second annual Ice Cream Social on June 10, 2017. There will be free ice cream for all adults and children who visit the HSOB Museum at 90 Broad Street (located on the third floor of the Children’s Library) between the hours of 11:00am and 2:00pm. Rain or shine.

The event is open to the public and free of charge, so bring a friend! Parking is on Broad Street and in the Library Parking Lot on State Street. More info: www.hsob.org, 973-743-8844, info@hsob.org.



BROAD & BAY LANES

Remembering the iconic bowling alley 40 years after it went up in flames...

The Summer of 1977 was a weird one. A serial killer calling himself The Son of Sam stalked New York City, and as if the five boroughs didn't have enough problems, on July 13, lightning struck several power lines north of the city. New York's circuit breakers started tripping like dominoes and the city experienced a massive blackout, followed by looting, fires and the arrests of 3,500 people. Elvis Presley died in August and on July 7, 1977, Bloomfield's beloved Broad & Bay Lanes, a bowling alley located on the corner of Broad Street and Bay Avenue, went up in flames.

7-7-77

"It was a slow night, only three parties that day, so I closed early," said John Colgate, co-owner of Broad & Bay, in an interview with the HSOB.

"I left at 8:20pm and went home [to his house on Barbara Street]. At 8:40, there's a knock on my screen door, and someone is telling me the bowling alley is on fire. 'Impossible, I just left there,' I said. My kids came running up Broad Street from McDonald's and they thought I was still in there."

According to Colgate, the cause of the fire is unknown. There was a false report in one of the newspapers that Broad & Bay had been closed that Saturday night for lacquering, but that was not true, as Colgate said they were planning on lacquering the lanes the following Monday.

Frankie's Car Wash owned the property, but didn't want to rebuild and instead sold it. The lanes were bulldozed and nothing inside was salvageable.

"When the lanes burned down, people would walk up and down Broad Street with tears in their eyes," he said. "They were crying more than we were. It was a very family-oriented place."



April 1972: Winners of the Boys' Bantam Division of the Bloomfield Board of Recreation-sponsored Bowling Tournament are flanked by former Broad & Bay pin boys Mayor John Kinder (left) and Manager John Colgate (right). Photo courtesy of John Colgate.



In the late 1970s, Carmela Colgate served as bowling instructor for the Bloomfield Board of Recreation-sponsored Girls' Bowling League, conducted at Broad & Bay Lanes. Pictured: The Seasons and The Angels take First Place Honors in the 2:30pm Division and the 4:30pm Division, respectively. Photo courtesy of John Colgate.

Home Away from Home

Broad & Bay Lanes opened in September of 1940. David Roberts of Glen Ridge built it as bowling alley/ roller rink, but there ultimately wasn't enough space for a roller rink. It had 14 lanes, and at it's height of popularity, hosted five leagues a day playing from 9am until midnight. In 1940, a game cost 25 cents; the pin boys (who reset the pins by hand), got 11 cents of that, plus tips. Pin boys were usually high school students from Bloomfield and Belleville. There were no pin girls.

Former Bloomfield Mayor John Kinder was a pin boy from 1941-44.

"Ironically, I'm now moving to Kinder Towers (senior apartments on Hoover Avenue)", laughed Colgate.

"My father made \$22 a week driving a bus," he explained further. "Some weeks I could make more than him at the bowling alley, setting up pins for a hundred games on Saturday, a hundred games on Sunday and 660 games during the week. During WWII, we loved to see the service guys bowl. They would put a dollar in the ball [as

a tip] and roll it down, whereas everyone else would just throw the money.”

All the were pins set by hand until the lanes went semi-automatic around 1955 and automatic in 1965. Broad & Bay was the third establishment in NJ to get automatic scoring, following Bowlero Lanes and Curtis Lanes in Trenton.

“When we first got the automatic lanes, we didn’t own them, they were leased to us for 10 or 11 cents per line from American Machine & Foundry (known after 1970 as AMF, Inc.) in Clifton. Meters recorded how many games were bowled so there was no cheating.”

Colgate graduated from pin boy and worked with Bob Cumming and Larry Sperduto (from Belleville) as managers and handymen. They did all the mechanical work themselves, which saved a lot of money.

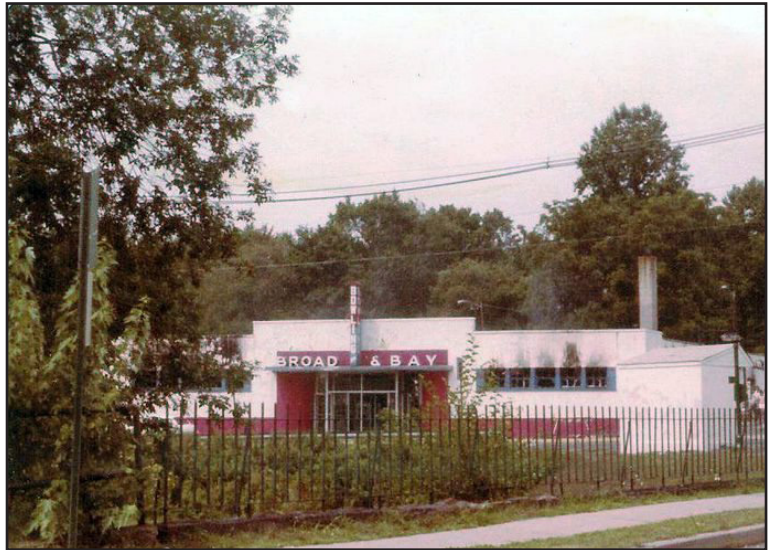
“Bob Cumming was a very gifted mechanic, he fixed everything in-house. He lives in Manahawkin now.”

After the owner, Michael Herce, retired in early 1960s, the three men became equal partners. When Sperduto passed away in the early 1970s, Colgate and Cumming became co-owners.

The lanes, smelling of lacquer, oil and shoe spray, became a home-away-from-home, especially for children. Parents would drop off kids on a Saturday morning and pick them up later and never have to worry because there was always staff, mostly female, on the lanes to look after them, explained Colgate.

“Bowling alleys didn’t have ‘bumpers’ back then (which eliminate gutter balls and virtually guarantee hitting at least one pin). It would break your heart when a kid didn’t hit a pin, but they had fun in other ways, like pizza parties. Kids had to earn [their score] with athletic prowess, not like now, when something is given to you just for being there.”

Broad & Bay had a full kitchen luncheonette until the late 1950s, run by Colgate’s friend Helen Kettle. Ultimately, it became more profitable to have vending machines. The lanes had the first microwave oven in town in the mid 1960s. Kids would line up just to look at it. It was big, heavy and hard to see through the glass. Six or seven vending machines dispensed pre-made hot dogs, hamburgers, etc. for heating in the microwave.



*The bowling alley as seen from Bay Avenue, by Brookside Park.
Photo courtesy of Mark Scurman.*



Notice the sign: Broad & Bay had a luncheonette with a full kitchen up until the late 1950s, when it was replaced by vending machines. Photo courtesy of Tim Smith.

“Left-handed bowlers dominate with the synthetic lanes because the conditioner is more worn down on right side; being a lefty is now an added advantage. Before synthetic lanes, you could count on one hand the exceptional left-handed bowlers in Essex County. Now there are many.”

Another good source of revenue was bowling shoe rentals.

“By the time the shoes wore out, we made three times the money we paid for them,” explained Colgate.

“We bought them from bowling suppliers such as Brunswick or AMF. The shoe size was on the back. Sometimes people would steal them just for fun, to wear when going out.”

Leagues would come from all around and bowl from opening to closing: men’s, women’s, mixed, children’s, factory leagues, Essex County civic leagues and the Holy Name League, which was comprised of church-bowlers from all over. No alcohol at all was allowed, except for the Monday Night Glen Ridge Men’s League, which was BYO. Staff was not allowed to even touch the empties.

“The league would police themselves so as not to ruin it for others,” said Colgate.

Broad & Bay eventually brought in a TV so patrons could watch *Celebrity Bowling* and in 1975, the owners painted the building red, white and blue in anticipation of the U.S. Bicentennial. In 1965, the wooden lanes were replaced with synthetic lanes.

“Nowadays, all lanes are synthetic,” explained Colgate.



General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF BLOOMFIELD

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The Man Behind the Pins

Bowling since he was 14, John Colgate was born in 1929 on Glenwood Avenue in his grandmother's house and moved to Broughton Avenue when he was 10. He went to Watsessing School, then Demarest (where he was a champion marble player), Bloomfield Junior High (later known as South Jr.) and graduated BHS in 1947. He attended Sacred Heart Church, where he always sat under St. Thaddeus.

"My bowling team in high school was undefeated," he said proudly.

"We'd drive to all the high schools and compete in their local bowling alleys. Bloomfield High's home turf was Broad & Bay or Rogers Recreation on Bloomfield Avenue, near the Royal Theater."

In those days, there was a dairy farm and horse farm on Broughton Ave.; later three houses rescued from Parkway demolition were moved there. There was a swimming hole where St. Thomas church is now. Pulaski Park was just a hill for sleigh riding on cardboard or garbage can lids, or for playing football on the level areas. Milk was delivered by horse, and the rag man, ice man and knife sharpener man used to come down everyone's street.

"The knife sharpener guy used to play second base for Bloomfield High," recalled Colgate.

"Making money in the bowling lanes, I went to school in a sports jacket, shirt and tie every day. I was a Depression baby, but we always had food and clothes. We had one pair of shoes and if we wore them out, we had to use cardboard to fill the holes. We learned the value of money. We used to sit on the stoop until midnight, because there was no air conditioning. I'm glad I lived in the times I did; Bloomfield isn't as nice now. I hope Bloomfield keeps it the way we used to have it."

After high school, Colgate served two years in the National Guard and two years in the army in Korea. He saw a lot of action, and, as a combat wireman, laid field telephone lines because walkie-talkies and radios didn't work in the mountains.

It took Colgate 35 years to bowl his first perfect game and then he bowled two in one month.

"But I'm more proud of bowling an 800," he said, "which is more difficult. That's a 266 times three."

Colgate's uncle was a builder and built him a house in 1956 on Barbara Street. It was the first and only house on the street until 1960. There was one lone electrical pole with a long wire to the Colgate house; on the day electricity was to "go live," there was a thunderstorm and the house had to be hooked up the next day instead.

Barbara Street was named after the contractor—Frank Fritz'—daughter, as was nearby Fritz Street. Frank Fritz had coal yard and ice dock above Broughton at the top of Barbara Street. John Colgate used to carry Barbara Fritz' books home from school.

Colgate and his wife Carmela (Mel) have four children, six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He still runs bowling tournaments and is currently running the NJ State Tournament as we go to press. He belongs to the Hanover Lanes Senior Leagues and is in four Bowling Halls of Fame: Passaic, Essex, New Jersey and the Bloomfield Athletic Hall of Fame (1983).



Bowling alley shenanigans. Photo courtesy of Bobby Cole.