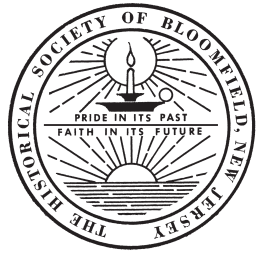




The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

SEPTEMBER 2005

MEETING

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

CHARLES MCSORLEY TO PRESENT PROGRAM ABOUT MATHEW B. BRADY

*Cameraman of the Civil War
and first to systematically
photograph a war.*

Two years ago this coming November, members may remember that Mr. McSorley calls himself an independent historian and showed his initiative in high school. His American History teacher accepted his proposal to do a project on Mathew B Brady. McSorley wanted to use materials his parents had collected and make slides of the photographs to deliver a slide lecture about them in lieu of a written term paper. He did so with an audience of 200-300 and was amazed at how interested everyone was. Despite this successful project, he did not make a video of them, as his mother urged, saying no one would be interested. Later, using many still pictures, Ken Burns did his series on the Civil War, making a video of them. (McSorley, when asked, said he did get an A in that class.)

Continued on page 2



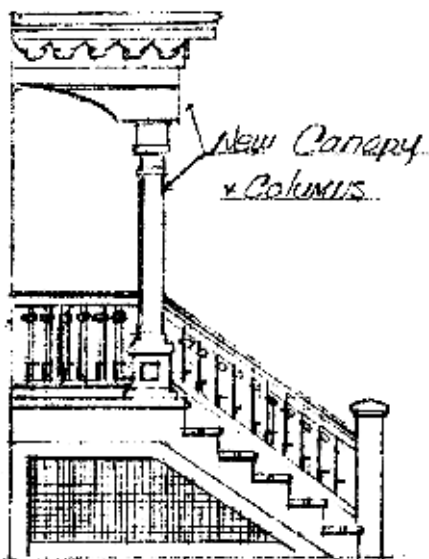
THE RESURRECTION OF 98 BROAD STREET

By: Joanne DelCorso

When the Valse Brothers, Don, Pat and Fred, purchased the building at 98 Broad Street in Bloomfield, New Jersey, it was in great need of a face-lift. The paint was peeling, the trim was rotted and the "remuddling" done to the building in the late 40's had stripped away its original charm. The brothers, all master carpenters and the owners of Valco Contractors, wanted to resuscitate some historical life back into their building and were up to the challenge. The first thing to be tackled was the building's interior. The tattered rugs were replaced by hardwood floors and porcelain tile, new windows were installed

throughout, the plaster walls were refinished, the trim repaired, new light fixtures were installed and period paint colors were carefully chosen. The following spring, Valco undertook an extensive exterior renovation. The brothers designed and built a new front porch and rear staircase, replaced the rotted corbels, clapboard and trim with their own hand milled replicas, refinished all of the old ironwork, installed period lighting, labored over paint colors, created new stone paths and replaced the scraggy shrubs with lively new landscaping. The accompanying photographs show the dramatic result.

Moulding To Match Existing



— An Appreciation —

Having heard through the grapevine that a new porch was being added to the "Remuddled" house at 98 Broad, it was with only superficial curiosity to see what further indignities could possibly befall this already ruined old house that brought the editor to casually glance at further insensitive changes. The sight was something of a shock. Instead of yet another tacky botch, the well-designed and proportioned porch suited the building perfectly, even to the replication of the few bits of original 19th century decorative trim that escaped the firm of Goth and Vandal, architects in charge of the 1949 desecration.

Contacting one of the owners, Mr. Donald Valse, resulted in a grand tour of the premises, which have been changed from tacky medical offices into rooms that could (and should) appear on Channel 40. Don showed me the basement; essential to any Historian who wants to see what has happened to an old building over the years. And, he even provided a copy of his working drawing for the new porch (reproduced at left).

This renaissance of a previously nondescript building on Broad Street in the Historic District is a gigantic step forward in Historic Preservation. More importantly, Mr. Valse followed Historic District guidelines in his work on the building, which cannot be said for some other landmarks in the vicinity.

Madame Cooke's School

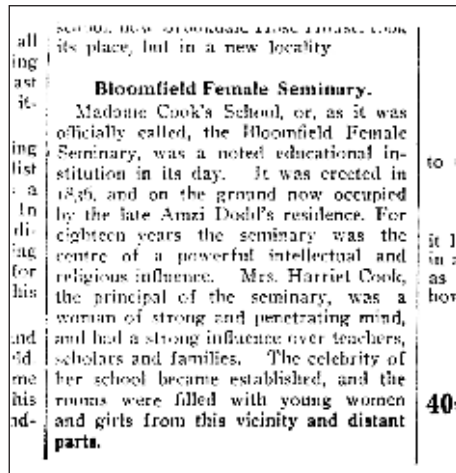


Research into number 98 Broad Street has found that it was built just north of Madame Cooke's Academy for Young Ladies as a residence for Robert L. Cooke, who took over the management of the school after his mother's retirement in 1858 and her death in 1862. Cooke lived there until he closed the school and offered his home and "a lot", probably the site of the demolished academy, in the Bloomfield Citizen. A brownstone obelisk in Bloomfield Cemetery bears his name on its east side and adds that he died "off Fire Island on August 11, 1877". He had been boating that day when a sudden thunderstorm came up. A fatal bolt of lightning struck either Mr. Cooke or his

boat – a sad and sudden end for a good man.

The Bloomfield Public Library has a copy of Mrs. Cooke's book, published in 1858 in which she relates, in rather boring detail, the story of what must have been a fascinating career. Any historian who managed to plow through her religious sermonizing, common to her times when sudden death sat behind everyone's chair, will be disappointed. There is very little solid information about life in Bloomfield in the early and mid-1800's or her personal life. She seems so much concerned about violating other peoples' privacy that names are too often given as initial letters. We might guess who Mr. "S" might be, but the wonderful picture she could have provided of 19th century life (and death) is incomplete.

The letters written home from her school are much better. The young ladies were much more likely to gossip freely to their loved ones living at such great distances from Bloomfield (such as Parsippany) that we can get a fairly good look at life on Broad Street from the following letters:



FROM THE INDEPENDENT PRESS
February 1, 1918

Bloomfield, August 18th, 1839

Dear Brother

It is some time since I have heard from you. I suppose you can say the same of me but really the weather has been so warm that I do not feel like doing anything & have got out of the way of writing letters...

There have been a number of deaths in the neighborhood of my school and as Bloomfield is quite a small place a death is rather much taken notice of. One was a little boy who attended our school last season. He was the only boy Mrs. Cooke would take because he was so good. The whole school went to his funeral. There are two or three persons on the point of death in this place. Mrs. Cooke still continues very sick although much better in comparison to what she was. All this sickness and death is to show us the shortness of life and we ought [sic] always to be prepared to go when Christ calls . . .

*Your ever affectionate sister,
Harriet*

Letter to Miss Mary Ford, Parsippany, New Jersey, Postmarked Jan. 14, 1847.

. . . I have yet said nothing of Mrs. C.[ooke] While we were at home in recess she had all of her teeth extracted in the view of having new ones in their place. She was saved the pain of the operation by the effects of a gas which she inhaled, but of course her mouth was very sore. Her nervous system seem[s] now to be very much affected. She has had several turns [underlined] I hardly know what to call them, in which she seemed completely unstrung.

*With much love from myself, I am yours affectionately,
Martha*

ELECTION OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BLOOMFIELD

REVISED SLATE OF OFFICERS, 2005-2007
SUBMITTED BY NOMINATING COMMITTEE,
SEPTEMBER, 27, 2005

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BYLAWS,
THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE SUBMITS
THE FOLLOWING SLATE OF OFFICERS
FOR A TWO YEAR TERM:

- | | |
|---|--|
| PRESIDENT
Jean Kuras | TREASURER
Emma Lou Czarnecki |
| VICE PRESIDENT
Mary Wilbert | TRUSTEES
Frederick W. Branch
Pat Cavanaugh
Mary Shoffner
Richard West |
| CORRESPONDING SECRETARY
Marlina Bua | IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT
Ina Campbell |
| RECORDING SECRETARY
Audrey Moore | |

The election will be held in September at which time additional names may be submitted from the floor.

Submitted by: Emma Lou Czarnecki, Dorothy E. Johnson, and Audrey Moore. Co-Chairs, Nominating Committee.

"MEETING" (continued from page 1)

Abraham Lincoln knew Brady and his work. Lincoln spoke in February 1860 at Cooper Union while campaigning for the presidency. Afterward, a picture of Lincoln beardless was taken in Brady's studio. Ferrotypes of this picture were sent across the country. His great Cooper Union speech and Brady's picture of a beardless Lincoln are credited with winning the presidency for Lincoln.

Lincoln encouraged Brady's coverage of the Civil War by giving him permission to take pictures in the field. We all carry Brady in our wallets, McSorley says. The face of Lincoln on the \$5.00 bill was taken in Brady's studio.

This program is offered through the HORIZONS SPEAKERS BUREAU and the National Endowment for the Humanities. It is free and open to the public.

The Historical Society of Bloomfield begins its September 27th meeting at 8:00 p.m. with a brief business meeting at the Civic Center, 84 Broad Street. There is parking in the rear, off State Street. Refreshments will follow the Brady program.



A HOMETOWN GIRL

There were many casualties of the Stock Market crash in 1929. Some business executives, accustomed to a high life style, and seeing all of it wiped out in a few days, jumped to their deaths from hotel windows. Others tried to hold on in the desperate hope of a turnaround, engineered by J.P.



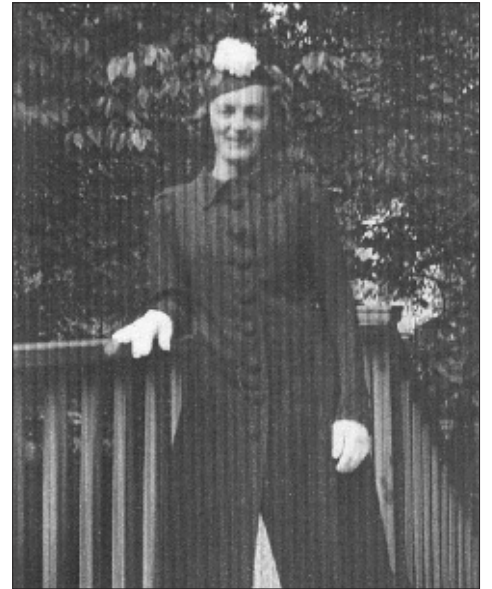
Stella Davis. Photo dated July 6, 1938, Age 18.

Morgan and other giants of finance, only to have these hopes dashed as the situation got worse. The Crash affected everybody, particularly those who didn't have too much to begin with.

With the coming of World War II in 1941, the economy got a gigantic shot in the arm. Anyone able to stand on their feet and count to ten was working in a War Plant and making up to \$100 a week – a fortune in those days of ridiculously low prices. But what of those who couldn't hold on; those of little faith and no hope; those who had been refused employment once too often?

A tragic fate awaited Bloomfield-born Stella Davis of New Street. On the day before her 21st birthday, she and her boyfriend had a very serious discussion about the impossibility of their marriage without either of them having a job, which led to a suicide pact. Crumbling newspaper clippings of 1940 report the few facts in seven paragraphs: he survived the fumes from the unlit hot water heater; she did not. These faded photographs, found among the effects of her recently deceased friend, record the simple beauty of this misguided girl.

The inscription on the back is July 6, 1938, possibly her 18th birthday. She is dressed for the occasion in a full-length crepe dress (possibly blue) and wearing a corsage of roses. The photo below is dated May 26, 1939. It may have been another special occasion; possibly Easter, since Stella is wearing a new outfit, complete with matching hat (never omitted on Sunday) and is most likely on her way to church. Stella was a faithful communicant of old Saint Valentine's Church on Hoover



Stella Davis, photo dated May 26, 1939.

Avenue and very likely walked there every Sunday on the nearby canal towpath. She smiles happily into the camera; and would be dead in a little more than a year.

Survivors included her widowed mother, two sisters and three brothers who were busily preparing for her 21st birthday. Did they ever "get over it"? Probably they did not. The Great Depression had claimed six more casualties; seven if you count whom the newspapers called "her Sweetheart" who lived on to carry this burden for the rest of his life.

That Pesky (and Dangerous) Bridge

Here are two extensive accounts of Township Meetings copied verbatim from "The Bloomfield Citizen", a local newspaper of the late 19th century. They are worth repeating here because they reflect the frustration over a problem (still with us) that has proved unsolvable for almost 150 years.

From The Bloomfield Citizen, May 22, 1886:

"At the last meeting of the Township Committee, a resolution was presented requesting the Committee to pass a resolution requiring the New York and Greenwood Lake Railway [later the Erie] to rebuild their bridge over Belleville Avenue in such a way as to cross the street by a single span. The bridge now has three abutments or supports located in the line of the street, one of them being directly in the middle of the roadway. This is very dangerous to the public, and several accidents have occurred there in consequence of it.

When the bridge was first erected [in 1871] it was understood it would be a temporary structure, and that a new and suitable one would take its place in a few years, but 15 years have now passed and it is time the nuisance was abated. This petition was signed by a large number of influential property owners, and the clerk was directed to notify the company to remove the bridge [!]. If this request is not complied with, the most

efficacious remedy will be to have the company indicted for obstructing the streets."

Did the Railroad comply with the Township Committee's demands? Read on.

From The Bloomfield Citizen, May 25, 1889

"The N.Y. & G.L.R.R. Company's difficulties with the Town of Bloomfield were again brought up at the meeting on Monday night. Chairman Ward inquired whether there had ever been an understanding between the Committee and the Company that the proposed new iron bridge over Belleville Avenue promising 18 inches more clearance over the roadway would be acceptable to the Committee. Mr. Benson said that no such agreement was ever made to his knowledge. 36 inches* more clearance was what was insisted upon by the Committee. Mr. Cook said that the Railroad Company's Counsel suggested that we gain the additional clearance by scooping out the roadway under the bridge [!]. "But we don't propose to do any scooping" said Mr. Benson "the Railway Company has no right to say what we shall do in regard to our streets." Mr. Dodd did not take kindly to the scooping idea and plainly said so. A general discussion participated in by all ensued. A former experience with the Company over this same bridge was related in which it shown how the Company under pretense at making repairs succeeded in

erecting the present obstruction over the avenue. A renewal of the indictments was talked of. Someone remarked that indictments against the Company did not amount to anything. "Well, let's try them in the courts and see" was replied.

"The discussion culminated in the passage of a motion offered by Mr. Benson directing the Clerk to write to the Railway officials and to their counsel, R. Wayne Parker, requesting on behalf of the Committee, a copy of the plans and specifications of the proposed new bridge on Belleville Avenue. Notice was also served on the Company not to commence the erection of any structure at that point without the approval of the committee."

The result of the above efforts of some very distinguished Bloomfield Citizens versus the Erie Railroad was absolutely nothing. The so-called "new bridge" was built with the same clearance above the avenue as the old "temporary" wooden structure and the nuisance was passed on to future generations to solve.

To look at it from the railroad's point of view, there was nothing they could do about it either. The Montclair station was considerably higher than the Bloomfield Walnut Street Station (removed by the Garden State Parkway in 1952). A gradual incline a little more than a mile and a half long had to be es-



General Joseph Bloomfield

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OF BLOOMFIELD
90 Broad Street
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

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NEW TOWN CRIER STAFF

Frederick Branch, Editor
Pat Post, Assistant Editor

☞ **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.

Traci Ann Churchill, *Bloomfield, NJ*
Mary Elizabeth De Mallie,
Bloomfield, NJ
Halcyon Park Neighborhood
Association, *Bloomfield, NJ*
Kurt Hughes, *Bloomfield, NJ*
Ruth Marsters, *Montclair, NJ*

E-MAIL

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OR CALL US
at: 973-743-8844

"PESKY BRIDGE" (continued from previous page)

tablished from Walnut Street in Montclair to make it as easy as possible for the steam locomotives of the period to "make the grade".

The first bridge after the station was over the Morris canal, with plenty of room to spare. The second, over Spruce didn't count for much since Spruce was mostly residential, but Belleville Avenue was (and still is) the main east-west road between Montgomery and Franklin (now called Hoover). In addition, Belleville Avenue was the most direct route to Montclair and the Caldwells from the Passaic River, important a century ago. As for the "scooping out of the roadway" as suggested by the Railroad (surely in jest) the resulting mudhole can only be imagined since the town committee rightly scorned the idea.

Over the years, countless truck drivers, ignoring various warning signs erected by the Town, have come to grief under this solid and immovable obstacle. During World War Two, a truck overloaded with a towering cargo of precious nylon stockings tried to pass where others had failed. There were

broken boxes and stockings all over the street, mashed to a pulp by the impatient drivers of other vehicles, while the unfortunate driver stood on the top of his truck, gingerly lifting off the festoons of filmy hosiery draped over the rough and filthy girders of "that bridge".

Worst of all, about 20 years ago a careless bus driver attempted to drive his two-story monster, on its way to Atlantic City, under the infamous structure. This may have been the first time that there was an actual loss of life caused by the century-old unresolved dispute. Now that the iron horse no longer roars its way over Belleville Avenue, could the problem finally be resolved by the removal of the bridge? Or shall we "scoop out" Belleville Avenue.

**This minor alteration in the roadbed would have made it necessary to raise the entire mile-and-a-half plus track between Walnut Street, Bloomfield, and Walnut Street, Montclair.*



Photograph by John Gibson

LOST BOOKMOBILE

The Bloomfield Library is good it's true
It's good to me and it's good to you
But, oh, our Bookmobile is gone
Now what shall we do?

For those of us who drive
We watch our gas bills rise
For many of us live
So far away.

For those who cannot drive
We watch our bus fare rise
And we feel a deep despair
From day to day.

No more is reading fun
No more an easy run
For now our bookmobile
Has gone away.

By Sharon McCan

From "Bloomfield Through These Eyes", an evening of poetry about Bloomfield at "Oaksid" Cultural Center, Saturday, March 30, 1985.



Photo of the Bookmobile by Dorothy Johnson, 1967.)

A sad lament about the demise of The Bloomfield Public Library's Bookmobile service, which was greatly appreciated by senior citizens and the residents of the Brookdale section of town. Although it is now 20 years old, Ms. McCan's poem seems unusually timely in these days of increasing bus fares and gasoline prices that have skyrocketed overnight.