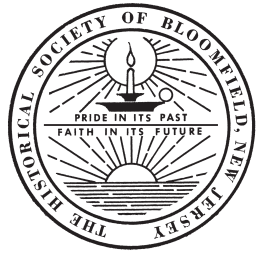




# The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

MARCH 2010

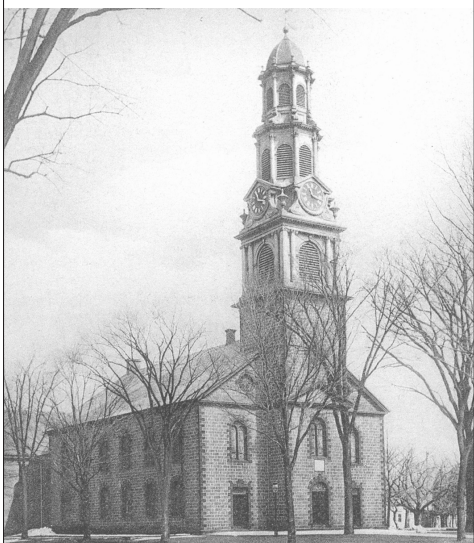
MEETING  
TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 2010  
8:00 PM  
BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER  
84 Broad Street, Bloomfield

## Guest Speaker Don Cornell

Of Bloomfield's many houses of worship, the original is the First Presbyterian Church, known as "The Old First Church on the Green." In the autumn of 1796, the community made preparations for the groundbreaking for a new house of worship on land donated by the Davis family. The spirit of patriotic pride succeeding the Revolution led the congregation to honor General Joseph Bloomfield by choosing his name, calling its church the Presbyterian Society of Bloomfield. They carved "Bloomfield 1796" into the white marble tablet which today remains over the church's main door.

Our speaker, Don Cornell, will discuss the history of this still active church and distinguished historical site. Don was a leader of the church tour the Historical Society held last year to great acclaim and is an enthusiastic historian and member of this beautiful church.

Join us for what promises to be a most outstanding evening and bring a friend!



## How To Join The HSOB

The Society welcomes anyone who has an interest in local history and who wants to know more about it. Anyone 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 Street, Bloomfield 07003

## GENERAL ELECTRIC 1960-2010

~ Gone These Fifty Years ~



General Electric Fire Department

The General Electric Company has been forgotten, so much so that the owners of the six-story red brick building at Five Lawrence Street have actually told a reporter from Bloomfield Life that they own the "former Westinghouse property". This is not surprising, inasmuch as this once prominent star in the firmament of important Bloomfield industries, one that employed two thousand people during World War Two and which constructed one of the largest local manufacturing facilities in 1918, had hardly bothered to identify their building in any permanent way. As evidenced by the accompanying photograph, the only place where "General Electric Company" appeared was over the front entrance (which faced the Orange Branch of the Erie Railroad) in painted lettering barely a foot high.

Even after the Garden State Parkway was constructed on the west side of Lawrence Street, exposing the city-block long side elevation to thousands of passing cars every day, the opportunity to mark the impressive structure with the world-famous GE monogram was not taken. But by that time, the decision to abandon Bloomfield may already have been made.

As is too often the case, this old photograph of ca. 1925 has hardly any identification on its reverse. However, some kind soul did write the following: "GE Fire Department, Lawrence Street, Bloomfield N.J. Back row 6th from left: Joseph Bill (Williow Street Blfd, N.J.) deceased; middle row, 4th from left: George West (Myrtle Street, Blfd, N.J.) deceased; 1st row,

## The Building With No Street Number

There have been a few "improvements" made to the front entrance of the 1918 General Electric building, among them a clumsy and inappropriate brick vestibule that has replaced the original metal and glass canopy.

Historians who look for the company's address may be puzzled that it doesn't appear in the city directories. The reason for this could well be that the front door of both the main building and the gatehouse do not front on Lawrence Street, but are set behind high metal gates in a fence, and are therefore on private property. All printed envelopes had "5 Lawrence Street, Bloomfield" for many years, but the address seems to have been unofficial, and the directories have always called it "\_\_\_ Lawrence Street". And although the front gate was in Bloomfield, nine-tenths of the structure was in East Orange.

## MORRIS CANAL

Is there anybody around Bloomfield who remembers, or is willing to admit that they remember, when the Morris Canal contained water? (It was officially drained by the State of New Jersey in 1924.) Well, if we can count the rainwater that collected in the dried-up ditch near Belleville Avenue, obliterated by Kennedy Drive in the early 1950's, then your editor remembers water in the canal. Or, THE CANAL, since it is still fondly remembered as a picturesque feature of Bloomfield by those whose parents were not even born when it ceased to exist.

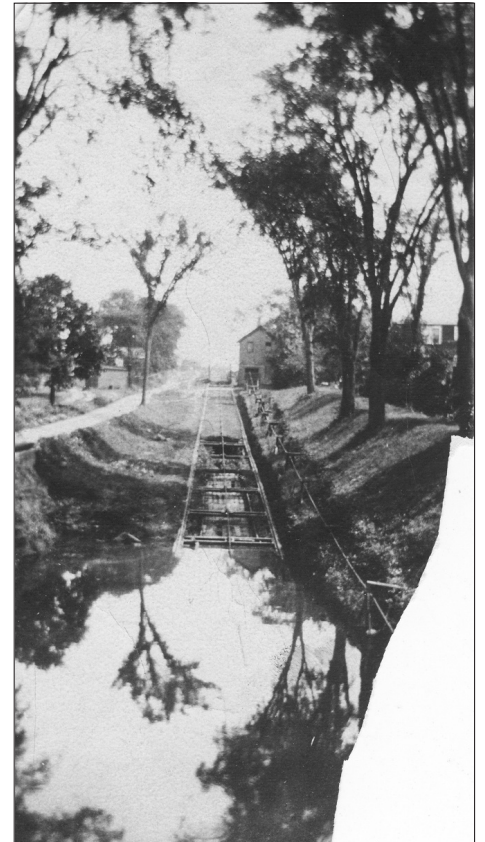
Or did it "cease to exist"? A slide program about it will still bring out Canal buffs, the HSOB Museum has paintings of it by Charles Warren Eaton and other lesser known artists, and the curator of the HSOB Museum still searches among the latest donations to the Historical Society in the hope that a hitherto unknown view of The Canal will come to light.

And there are the five heavy and bulky albums of old maps of Bloomfield in the late 1800's and early 1900's that were a generous and valued gift from the Township a few years ago, plus the 1856, 1865, 1888, 1890, 1906, 1932, maps in the Museum and in the Public Library that show this waterway as an important landmark that was the basis for property lines of adjacent lands by Charles Olmstead (brother of the famous creator of New York's Central Park and Newark's Branch Brook Park) and by other surveyors.

Nor has it vanished from the cartographer's memory. Check out your latest copy of Hagstrom's Map of Essex County. See the parallel dotted lines that branch off Kennedy Drive in the vicinity of Newark Avenue and resolutely head east? Although not labeled as such, they are the ghost of what was, and still is, one of the most famous landmarks in New Jersey.

*(Photo caption) A very recent discovery of a canal view is shown here.*

*Although some parts are missing, this is a good photo of the incline in operation. The empty car is directly opposite the stone turbine house, either on its way to the top to pick up a barge on its way to Newark, or vice-versa.*

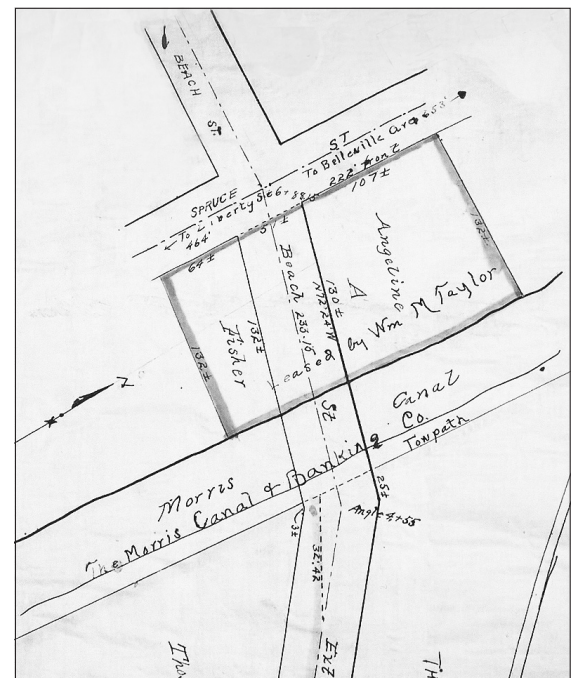


## The Lion File Works



A Russell Real Estate photograph, date unknown but surely before 1900, of an abandoned factory building, location given as "at the foot of Beach Street at the Morris Canal". The 1888 map shows a building at this location, the outline of which corresponds with this one: a long structure perpendicular to The Canal with several small brick outbuildings and a chimney. We might also suspect that there was a loading dock at the other end of this building that allowed freight to be transferred to canal barges. Also referring to the map, this view was taken from Spruce Street in an easterly direction, and the horizontal line from left to right across the lower third of the photo is the canal itself. Another guess is that the embankment just above may be the Erie Railroad that crossed the canal near Belleville Avenue. And, since this photo is from Realtor Nathan Russell's file, the factory is obviously abandoned and for sale.

Another map in the archives of the HSOB was drawn to show the extension of Beach Street across The Canal to the site of the proposed new station at Walnut Street. The extension goes through this property and was, more than likely, the reason the factory, once spoken of as making packing boxes for shipping Peloubet Organs, is no longer with us. Further research has failed to turn up any references to a "Lion File Works" so we may never be absolutely sure that the photo is of that building. Circumstantial evidence suggests that it was.



Ca. 1900 map

## The Potter Flouring Mill

Working a few hours a week in the Museum of the HSOB is very rewarding. New people drop in with faded old photographs or postcards that they "found in the attic," sure that they are valuable and rare, only to find that we already have more than several of each. Occasionally, however, there is a photo that none of us have seen before, and it is this thrill that makes the time spent well worth every minute. And the people who bring them are so pleased that they have contributed yet another piece of Bloomfield history hitherto unknown.

It has long been known that there was a flouring mill in the vicinity of the Morris Canal plane that had never been photographed...or so we thought. A derelict millstone lay just outside the Collins House, but there was no other evidence that the old mill had ever existed. That is, until an unused storage closet was raided and the considerable amount of material, hidden there for about 20 years, came to light. And there, on a gigantic poster, was the mill, shown in all its rickety glory.

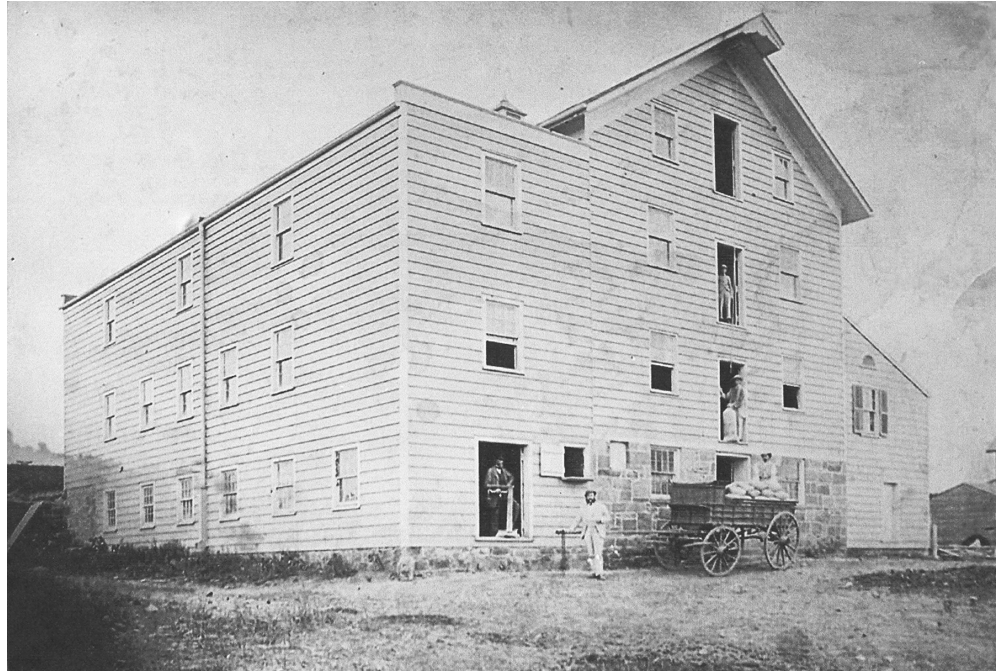
At first glance, the building, a good five stories in height, resembled a gigantic fire-trap, ready to explode in flames. Other man-made objects it resembled were the White Star Steamship, "Titanic," and the vertical aluminum airplane fuselages of the

World Trade Center. Dark clouds of disaster were hovering over each.

It would be a brave man who would climb to the top of the Potter Mill. Loose "seegars" were often carelessly discarded and the dust from the ground flour was not only flammable, but often exploded. The mill did eventually meet a fiery end and it is said that the written records of Bloomfield

Cemetery had been kept in its office for "safekeeping."

It was, of course, rebuilt, this time as a paper mill. It purchased water from the nearby Morris Canal Company and used the Third River to power its machines. The Marcal Company went out of business in Bloomfield in the 1970's and the manufacturing operations at that spot were replaced by Kinder Towers.



## "Gingerbread"

During the early 20th century, owners of "Victorian" houses were encouraged to simplify the exteriors of their homes and improve the bad taste of their ancestors who had "misguidedly" enriched the exteriors with scroll-sawn decoration. It was suggested to remove this derision called "gingerbread" by detractors, and slick 50-cent (a lot of money in the 1940's) decorating magazines showed "before and after" photos of the improvements. Not everyone succumbed to this clarion call to "Colonialize", but there are many houses that were once much more interesting because of this decoration. Now they have a 'peeled' look, and at least two New Jersey Towns are famous for their exuberant scroll-saw decorated houses that have managed to survive the iconoclasts: Ocean Grove and Cape May (although not every building escaped).

Here in Bloomfield, many picturesque homes were ravaged. The now vanished Murray Funeral Home on Belleville and Williamson Avenues (originally the 1875 residence of Thomas Oakes) lost its magnificent front porch in the early 1940's when this beautifully designed fantasy in sawn wood was trucked away to a landfill. Somehow, although a new "Colonial" porch was substituted, what remained of the house had a mutilated look. Later on, a coat of aluminum siding finished the job. The Richards Kingsland Schuyler home at Belleville Avenue and Elm Street was similarly dis-

figured by the loss of its wide wrap-around front porch with its sawn-out leaf design in the balustrade, at about the same time.

Another remarkably ornate house that bit the dust in 1945 was the home of Doctor Joseph Austin Davis on Franklin and Fremont Streets. An aerial photo of Bloomfield Center in 1937 shows this 2½ acre estate a few years before the wreckers arrived. Fortunately, the demolition of this landmark was documented by an unknown developmentally challenged boy with a Brownie camera and a sense of history. He even stole parts of the building and preserved them in his attic for possible reevaluation by future generations. The recent restoration of the old mansion at 455 Franklin by Bloomfield College seems to make this more than a childish fantasy.

One of the preserved fragments of the Davis residence is shown as it is today, a small relic of a beautiful old house, and as it was in place in 1945 on the south side of the home of a descendant of Dr. Davis: Colonel Joseph Davis Sears. Sears sold the homestead and the last acreage of the once vast Davis plantation to a developer for \$36,000.00 (a fortune in those days) and went to live in more modest circumstances. And the days when the name "Davis" really meant something in Bloomfield were gone.



*Here is a gable in progress on the antique Barnes Velocipede Scroll Saw No. 2. Built in 1889, the saw contains a flat perforated belt and optional boring attachment.*



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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*Bloomfield Junior High School Student Council 1949-1950*

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**THIRD ROW:** Bob SanFilippo, Jack Sullivan, Bill Rust, Joe Reach, Joe Frank, Mary Fleming, Nancy Peterson, Mr. Moore

☞ **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.*

- Bruce & Yukiku Anderson  
*Bloomfield, NJ*
- Anne Carlino & Walter Nacnodovitz  
*Bloomfield, NJ*
- Margaret Harris  
*Bloomfield, NJ*
- Mary Shaughnessy & Brian Nalepka  
*Bloomfield, NJ*
- Mary Kate Simmons, Esq.  
*Bloomfield, NJ*
- Barbara Zingaro  
*Bloomfield, NJ*



*South Junior Middle School as it stands today.*

E-MAIL THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BLOOMFIELD AT:  
**BloomfHist@aol.com**  
 OR CALL US AT: **973-743-8844**

The editor would like to thank fellow HSOB Board member, Richard Rockwell, for his valued and much appreciated assistance in setting this recalcitrant computer to rights. We also regret having missed the September of the NTC because of various difficulties, and are very grateful to Richard for solving at least some of these.