



The New Town Crier



Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield

BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

OCTOBER 2010

SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2010

The meeting will be held at
THE CIVIC CENTER
84 Broad Street, Bloomfield, NJ
8:00 PM

DAVID G. KENNEDY
in

MARK TWAIN WIT AND WISDOM

In his one-man presentation, the speaker appears in costume and character, wig and white suit, as Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens). Selections from his autobiography *Roughing It*, *The Innocents Abroad*, and other works of his will be presented, along with slides of his beautifully restored Hartford home.

Clemens published more than 30 books, hundreds of short stories and essays and gave lecture tours around the world. By the end of his life in 1910, he had become known as the quintessential American author, having captured in his works the spirit, character, and even dialect of a diverse nation.

(Continued on page 4)



NEW JERSEY COUNCIL
FOR THE HUMANITIES

HSOB MEETINGS

TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2011

TUESDAY, MAY 17, 2011

To be held at the Civic Center,
84 Broad Street at 8:00 P.M.

Refreshments will be served after the meetings.

A GIFT FROM INVESTOR'S BANK

The American Savings Bank at 347 Broad Street recently erected a new and architecturally outstanding building, and to decorate the interior they commissioned large color reproductions of turn-of-the-century postcards of old Bloomfield scenes, suitably framed and hung on the walls of their new Frank Lloyd Wright style interior.

These pictures were more than usually appropriate for this business, which had started in the North Center Area many years ago and was originally known as "The Polish Bank". The bank recently changed hands and the new owners preferred to hang other materials in place of some of the pictures, so six of them were generously given to the Historical Society of Bloomfield Museum.

On hand to receive these welcome gifts from the bank when they arrived last March 18 was museum curator Dorothy Johnson, standing at the right. The considerable weight of the reproduction of a 1900 view of the Morris Canal near old Saint Valentine's Church was easily supported by Mr. Michael Wujek, whose grandfather lived in this neighborhood about the time the photograph was originally published. Mr. Wujek later enjoyed looking at a 1906 map of the area and was able to identify his grandfather's home. All six pictures have since been hung high on the north and south walls and are a colorful and impressive addition to the Museum's collection.



YOUNG HISTORIAN DOES WELL WITH TOUGH ASSIGNMENT

Last Spring, just before the end of the school year, a young man and his mother came into the HSOB Museum with a project that had been assigned by his teacher: to report on an historic Bloomfield building. It was not an easy job, inasmuch as the structure he selected (the old Franklin Hill School that predated the Revolution) had long disappeared and even the Historical Society isn't sure of its actual site. Nevertheless, Ben Cecere was sure that his grandfather's old home, on the NW corner of Willard Avenue and Franklin Street on land once owned by the Richards family and developed into a residential street by Alfred B. Van Liew in the early 1900's, stood on the site of the old brownstone building. Mrs. Cecere contributed a photograph of the house as it had appeared when she and her family lived there, pointing out that the sun room on the east end of the house could have been the original school house.

Unfortunately, the Historical Society Archives were not much help, but Ben did his best with what was available to

him and was able to make a reasonable case that the school once stood on this property. His presentation was well thought out and earned an "A Plus" from his teacher and the comment "fantastic job. Ben Cecere also attached relevant documents to his report which will be filed in the Museum archives.

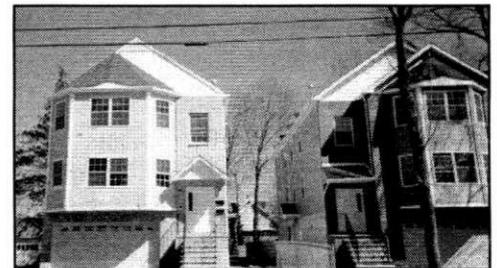
* * *

Requests for obscure information occasionally come to the Curator of the Museum, Mrs. Dorothy Johnson, who does her best to find appropriate documents. A recent visitor from Wilmington, Delaware, who is writing a book about American Engravers, was very anxious to find the location of the Samuel Dodd house, thought to be on the corner of Watsessing and Berkeley Avenues. Mrs. Johnson was able to find a 1963 newspaper article by the late Bloomfield Historian Herbert Fischer that gave a complete history and drawing of the house, now demolished. Mr. Stephen Beare was very grateful for this information for his book on New Jersey engravers, which should be published soon.



AN IMPROVEMENT ON MAPLE STREET

Two new two-family houses on the site of the 1840 Ghas house at 43 Maple Street show the appearance of the "new Bloomfield". The old house had occupied the entire property and had been known as "The Currier and Ives House" by local residents because of its quaint appearance. Possibly inspired by the 19th century architecture of the neighborhood, the architect of these replacements replicated the appearance of Victorian houses, using oversized bay windows across the front, ornate period mouldings, and authentic garage doors next to the high front stoops. They also cleverly built the houses close together and near the street, thus saving valuable space. It would be very difficult for the architectural historian to tell the difference between these and the existing old houses nearby.



LAST LOOK AT A LANDMARK

Although this building, Bloomfield High School, will commemorate its centennial in 2012, this side of the structure is seen here in what could well be the last view of its north facade. The original 1912 section at the left was carefully replicated by a row of Greek columns and an exact copy of the original Broad Street end when it was extended westward in the 1920's. This view was taken a few years ago from the SE corner of State Street and Belleville Avenue, before the modern additions obliterated it for all time. It is hoped that the row of columns behind the new wing has been preserved in case a more enlightened generation may want to restore the building in some future era.



A TRUE CRAFTSMAN

Marion C. Marshall

From at least half-a-block away, before I saw the big old fashioned shoe that hung over the door, I could hear the thudump, thudump, thudump of the huge, shiny black, heavy duty, sewing machine, as it mended the stitching on shoe tops or attached the shiny, new, freshly cut leather soles to the bottoms. There was the rap, rap, rap of the hammer as it set the nails that were held in the shoemaker's teeth and split into place on the thick, new, Cats Paw rubber heels. Within seconds, my nose tingled, teased by the fresh, pleasant odor coming from the large pieces of uncut leather and, in sharp contrast, the almost acrid smell emanating from dozens of open boxes of rubber heels. The strong, pungent odors of the glue and stains, brown and black, that overflowed their pots in front of the buffing machine and dripped from their long handled brushes as the repairman deftly spread them on the sides and backs of the new soles and heels, permeated the air as far away from the store as a city block. In addition to the big, heavy, sewing machine, there were other fascinating, rotating machines, and brushes of all sizes that filled one wall from front to back of the store and whirred, and hummed, smoothed out the edges of newly attached leather soles, buffed the sides of the soles and the heels, and stained and shined the shoes after they were repaired and, once again, "just like new." The finished pairs of shoes were wrapped tightly in sheets of plain brown paper. The shoemaker's half of the numbered ticket stub was firmly attached to the wrapper (exactly how, I don't remember), and the shoes were stacked, in numerical order on a long shelf situated above the machines. Despite the speed and, seemingly, carefree style of the repairman, I cannot ever remember seeing a sloppy, unevenly stained shoe. That man was a true craftsman.

On one occasion, as I approached the front of the shop, despite the oily, dusty,

film on the window, the opaque, greenish colored, shade, and the overall disarray, I could see, standing upright on their smooth, shiny, featureless, wooden heads, the hats that had been meticulously cleaned and blocked. Some were brown, some gray, and, that day, there was one fancy high black one (one of the customers really must have been rich). They had all been steam cleaned and were in the process of being blocked prior to pickup by their owners. Although I had seen the hats perched upon their decapitated and faceless wooden forms hundreds of times, I had never seen one being claimed by its owner.

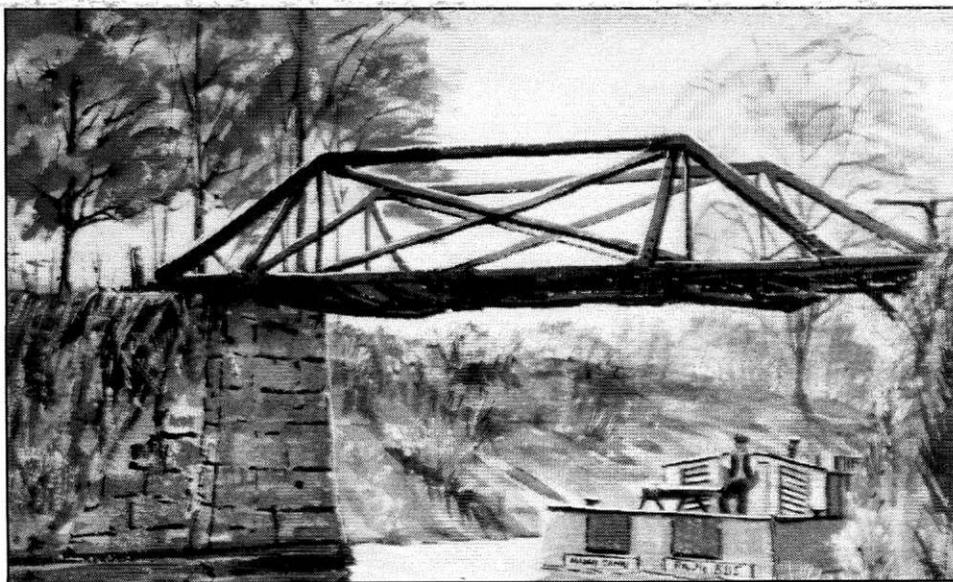
I have never understood the connection between shoe repair and hat blocking. Was there a message hidden there somewhere? Did the shoemaker want everyone to know that he could service their needs from head to toe — with some belt or pocketbook repair in between? (He even repaired saddles and riding boots.) How could someone as dirty looking as the shoemaker, with his soiled apron, filthy shoe-black stained fingers with their grimy nails, clean and reshape such seemingly expensive hats without ever leaving a smudge on them? Not only was he a true craftsman, he was a magician!

A BRIDGE ON THE MORRIS CANAL IN NUTLEY

No issue of the HSOB Newsletter would be complete, it seems, without at least one picture of the Morris Canal, whether it be an old photograph, woodcut, engraving, drawing, or, as is shown here, a watercolor. This one was painted by artist John Moore in 1960 and given to the Bloomfield Public Library in 1990 by the late Mrs. Ethel Semps of Chestnut Street, Nutley. It now hangs in a room set aside for quiet study in the south-west corner of the former Board Member of the Library.

The Morris Canal was never of much benefit to the section of Bloomfield that later became Belleville and then Nutley. The northern section of the canal once traced the boundary between Belleville/Nutley and Bloomfield, a job now done by the ubiquitous Garden State Parkway. And it was at the top of a hill and too far from the business and manufacturing sections, located near the Second and Passaic Rivers, to be of much value to commerce. But this bridge, wherever it was located, was at one time in Bloomfield.

The painting hangs in the Joseph Kliminski Room on the SW corner of the main floor.





General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF BLOOMFIELD

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PICTURE DIGITIZING BY

Richard Rockwell

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Roscann Ratz

EDITOR RETIRES

After completing a substantial stack of newsletters over the past decade, and having passed his 85th birthday in the meantime, the Editor of this publication has decided, reluctantly, to pass the job on to "somebody" else. In the past year, the size of the original 8-1/2" x 14" pages has been reduced in length because that size of paper is no longer available, resulting in a shrinkage of a total of 16 inches in length of the space heretofore available for the material that has been gathered for these issues. The amount The Society is willing (and able) to pay for has been reduced to the point where it is no longer worth the considerable effort required to produce a result that is satisfactory to the Editor.

Much of the content planned for this issue can be held over until the next issue appears in March (if the board so desires). In any event, my work for the Historical Society of Bloomfield is now completed. My thanks to the many members who wrote encouraging letters over the years; it was this support that made my efforts worthwhile. Thanks also to John Gibson, Editor Ad Hoc. His help in tracking down the many errors in the Editor's sloppy typing, plus his witty comments on the content was much appreciated.

Frederick Branch

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Bloomfield Historical Society:

It is with sincerest gratitude that I am writing to you in appreciation of the scholarship your organization presented me with at the BHS Senior Awards. I have always had a great interest in history and plan on continuing my education as a history major at Montclair State University. I am interested in your organization and would like to know if there are any volunteer opportunities that I could participate in. If so, please contact me via E-mail.

Many thanks,

Jamie Van Beveren

* * *

Dear Fred,

Thank you for your letters. Somehow, I knew that, eventually, I would hear from you.

Please accept this letter as my permission to publish my story entitled, *A True Craftsman* and its accompanying letter. Aside from numerous letters to various newspaper editors throughout the eastern United States, it will be my first publication. Walter and I look forward to receiving our October copy of *The New Town Crier*.

If you are interested in additional "stories," please let us know. As I noted in my last letter, we have been writing memoirs for more than ten years and have some interesting and memorable things about Bloomfield and its environs. We will be happy to share them with your readers.

Thanks, again, for your letter.

Sincerely yours,

Marian C. Marshall

Marian C. Marshall

MARK TWAIN (Continued from page 1)

David G. Kennedy was the producer, director and main actor of his own ACTOR'S CAFE THEATRE in Bloomfield and elsewhere in Northern New Jersey for 17 years. He has appeared in over 180 productions (directing many of them) and has appeared off-Broadway and most recently on Broadway as a standby for Eli Wallach in Arthur Miller's *The Price*. He has studied extensively with Harold Clurman, Bill Hickey, Tony Mannino, Alice Hermes, and Philip Burton, and appeared on stage with Vivian Blaine, Farley Grainger, Virginia Gilmore, James Whitmore, Julius LaRosa, Leon Janney, Frank Lovejoy, and others.

This program is offered through the Horizons Speakers Bureau of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities