



# The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

March 2021



## Bloomfield Honors Black History Month

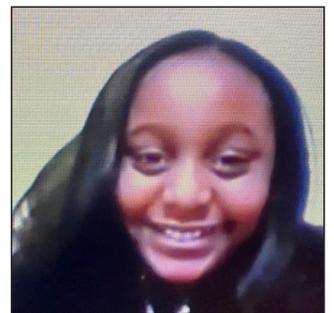
In honor of Black History Month, at the February 22, 2021 Bloomfield Council meeting, the Mayor and Council honored community residents who've given back to the greater-Bloomfield community. Held in conjunction with the Historical Society of Bloomfield, the honorees were inscribed into the HSOB via Zoom meeting.

First, Councilman Nick Joanow read a Black History Month Service Recognition proclamation in honor of New Jersey State Senator Ronald L. Rice, who has served in the NJ State Senate since 1986. Rice received an A.S. from Essex County College in Police Science, a B.S. from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Administration & Planning, and an M.A. from Rutgers University in Criminal Justice. He served as a Sergeant in the U.S. Marines from 1966–1970 in the Vietnam War. Before entering

Rice

politics, Rice was a Newark police officer for eight years. He also served 16 years on the Newark City Council (1982–1998) and was the Deputy Mayor of Newark from 2002 until March 2006, when he stepped down as deputy mayor in order to run for mayor. He is also Chair of the NJ Legislative Black Caucus and a major proponent of the funding of the Bloomfield school system.

Councilwoman Sarah Cruz read a proclamation for Macayla Norman, a “vibrant, loving and caring student at Carteret elementary school who loves reading, music and dance, and is passionate about having her voice and thoughts heard when it comes to social issues.” Her poem, “The poem of Love, Justice & Peace in Support of Black Lives Matter” was featured on *TIME* magazine’s Person of the Year 2020 special on NBC-TV in December. Norman read the poem for the participants of the Township Council Meeting.



Norman

Councilwoman Cruz also read a proclamation for Pastor Christine Harris-Spivey, who was recognized for her contributions made in the Bloomfield community through her leadership at the Citadel of Hope Worship Center. Harris-Spivey has led numerous volunteer programs supporting Bloomfield residents, such as the Felicity Towers Holiday Luncheon, winter coat drives and meal deliveries in partnership with the Bloomfield Department of Health.

“During Black History Month, the Township of Bloomfield would like to recognize the contributions that African Americans have made to Bloomfield’s economic, cultural, spiritual and political development by inscribing the honorees’ biographical information, stories and photographs into the Historical Society of Bloomfield,” stated Mayor Michael Venezia.



## Pick up a reusable bag at Bloomfield Stop & Shop and support the HSOB!

The HSOB is proud to announce it has been selected as a beneficiary of the Stop & Shop Community Bag Program for the month of March (2021). The HSOB will receive a \$1 donation every time the \$2.50 reusable Community Bag is purchased at the Stop & Shop located at **8 Franklin Street, Bloomfield, NJ** during the month of March.

## And one story leads to another...

*Editor's Note:* The Oct. 2020 issue of *The New Town Crier* featured an article on **The Franklin Arms Tea Room** at 409 Franklin Street. Back in the 20th C., its owners were named Marie & Carl Demmert. I asked readers to please write in if they knew anything of the Demmerts, and received the note below. This note then spawned the following article, "Memories of my Aunt Lollie." It just goes to show you how all of our Bloomfield memories and histories are connected. The HSOB welcomes all reminiscences, reveries, remembrances and personal histories. Email us at [info@HSOB.org](mailto:info@HSOB.org) or snail mail us at PO Box 1074, Bloomfield, NJ 07003-1074. For those of you who have submitted but not yet seen your story in print, we ask for your patience...



55 Oakland Avenue at the turn of the 20th Century.

**November 12, 2020**

Dear New Town Crier,

The Demmerts lived for time at the pretty, white house at the corner of Fremont [Street] & Oakland [Avenue]. Mark Scurman's grand-aunt also lived there—the exact time I don't know, but Mark probably would. The house was built by John Capen, the architect who designed the Bloomfield Children's Library (the original Bloomfield Public Library). Before the 409 Franklin Street address was a restaurant, it had been the home of the Higgins family. Mrs. Higgins had grandchildren my age. When they visited her they would come to our yard [on Fremont Street] to play. At that time, the property had a tennis court and a large vegetable garden that bordered our yard. Mrs. Higgins' son was Harold Higgins, a lawyer and officer at the Bloomfield Savings Bank (now Provident Bank)...

—Mary Shoffner, HSOB Corresponding Secretary

## Memories of my Aunt Lollie

By Mark Scurman, HSOB Trustee

My Great Aunt Laura Scurman was born in October of 1891 in Perth Amboy, NJ, along with three siblings: Edgar (my grandfather), Maude and Floyd (Laura's twin brother). She was the one most responsible for the Scurman family putting down roots in Bloomfield.

"Aunt Lollie," as we always called her, was a registered nurse and decided the town of Bloomfield was the place to start her business. She moved here sometime in the early 1920s. At the time, her business was referred to as a "small hospital." She cared for elderly women in a home she bought at 9 Fremont Street. I would imagine a small hospital would be a precursor to the modern day nursing home, but with fewer restrictions.

In the 1925 *Bloomfield Directory*, Lollie is listed as living at 55 Oakland Avenue. Business must have been good, enabling her to buy this second nursing home. I don't have any records of who worked with her, but she must have employed people to help. In 1930, her mother, Sarah, at age 72, came to Bloomfield to live with her and possibly Lollie cared for her, also.

In 1933, my grandfather Edgar died suddenly of a heart attack in Raritan, NJ at age 43, leaving my grandmother Alma, along with her three children—twins Leo (my father) and Edgar, and their younger brother William—alone during the Depression Era with nowhere to go. Aunt Lollie asked Alma to move to Bloomfield to help her with the nursing homes. Alma packed up the kids and moved to a flat on Jerome Place. Aunt Lollie helped my grandmother become a nursing assistant and they both worked together. My grandmother Alma also worked at the Park Manor Nursing Home in later years.



Portrait of Aunt Lollie, 1947.

So, that's a brief history of the Scurmans' arrival in Bloomfield.

Aunt Lollie was always a little odd, not in a weird way, but more eccentric. When we were younger (in the 1960s) our dad used to take the kids to see Aunt Lollie at her house at 55 Oakland Avenue, usually once a week. He would do odd jobs for her around the house. He was always very grateful that Lollie had taken care of his mom and family when they needed help. At the time, she still cared for elderly folks and we, as kids, were scared to death to go visit her; she was old, she lived in an old house, and had elderly women that were on the verge of senile living with her. It was kind of like visiting Miss Havisham, the character in the Charles Dickens' novel "Great Expectations."

I remember she always had bowl full of butterscotch candies in the front hall. My brother Leo was afraid to go into the basement. It was always dark and had this huge, ominous-looking furnace that would hiss and bang, like a monster lurking in the dark.

When my dad was doing whatever was needed around the house, Aunt Lollie would bring us around to say hello to the three or four women she was taking care of.



*Aunt Lollie in the backyard at 55 Oakland Ave.*

"Come here and see me, little boy," I remember one woman calling to me from her room. She repeated that three times. I told Aunt Lollie I didn't want to go see her, but Aunt Lollie said, "Come on, she won't bite you!" *Bite me? She's gonna bite me? No way!* But Aunt Lollie insisted. I was terrified, but I went in. The woman didn't bite me.

Another time, Aunt Lollie told me she had misplaced a box of chocolate candies and couldn't figure out where they went. Once again, we had to go around and visit her patients, and that's when we found the box of chocolates—a woman had stuffed them all down her blouse!

I was in Aunt Lollie's yard one day helping my dad rake up leaves. The second floor window opened up and a woman started screaming, "Murder, Murder!" Aunt Lollie said, "Oh, don't pay any attention to her." It was always an adventure going to see Aunt Lollie.

The house was beautiful inside and out. I think it was going to her house that sparked my interest in historic homes, history and antique furnishings. As I got older, I would visit Aunt Lollie every time I went to Bloomfield Center to buy records at **The Record Shop**

on Franklin Street. Her mind was as sharp as a tack. I would ask her about our family history and she'd pull out an old box that contained many photos of our family, the houses they lived in, old daguerreotypes from the 1860s, right down to my great-great grandfather.

My father would bring Aunt Lollie to our house to visit my grandmother, who lived with us. She enjoyed telling stories and always with a glass of wine or beer. She was never at a loss for words and was always very generous to our family. She would bring little gifts—most of the time they were things she had in her home that she thought we would like. Eventually, she had to sell the house on Oakland Avenue and go into a private nursing home herself on Clarendon Place, where I would visit her until she died. Before she passed, she said she wanted me to have the box of family photos that I now treasure. I guess she knew I was destined to be the family archivist.

I can't help but remember Aunt Lollie every time I ride past the house at 55 Oakland Avenue. The exterior hasn't changed much over the years. Whenever our family gets together and Aunt Lollie comes up in conversation, everyone has a story to tell. She was a lovable family character.



*Aunt Lollie with her mother Sarah*



*Aunt Lollie in later years enjoying a glass of wine and telling stories.*



*General Joseph Bloomfield*

### **THE NEW TOWN CRIER**

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF  
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF BLOOMFIELD

90 Broad Street  
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

Postal address: PO Box 1074  
Bloomfield, NJ 07003-1074  
Tel: 973-743-8844  
E-mail: [info@hsob.org](mailto:info@hsob.org)  
[www.hsob.org](http://www.hsob.org)

#### **OFFICERS**

Jean Kuras, *President*  
Walter Nacnodovitz, *Vice President/*  
*Program*  
Mary Shoffner, *Corresponding Secretary/*  
*Hospitality*  
Anne Carlino, *Recording Secretary*  
John Debold, *Membership*  
Cindi Debold, *Treasurer*  
Dorothy Johnson, *Museum Curator*  
Ava Caridad, *Publicity & Promotion*

#### **TRUSTEES**

Joseph Barry  
Tina Caridad  
Richard Rockwell  
Mark Scurman

#### **PAST PRESIDENT**

Ina Campbell†

#### **WEBMASTER**

Richard Rockwell

#### **NEWSLETTER STAFF**

Ava Caridad, *Editor*  
Nicholas D'Angelo, *Layout*

## 9th Hall of Fame recognition for Bloomfield legend John Gibson



*Photo from the Carter Family,  
Bloomfield TAP*

A Bloomfield athletic legend received his 9th Hall of Fame recognition on Jan. 24, 2021. John Gibson, who competed in the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam, was inducted into the USA Track & Field New York Officials Hall of Fame.

Gibson is also a member of the Helms Hall of Fame; the NJ Sports Authority Hall of Fame; the Halls of Fame at Seton Hall University, Bloomfield High and Fordham University; Garden State Hall of Fame; Sports Hall of Fame of NJ; and the NJ Sports Writer's Hall of Fame.

Gibson, who died in 2006 at the age of 101, and his wife of 69 years, the former Dorothy Croughan, raised their six children in Bloomfield. He was born on July 3, 1905. He would win his first track & field medal at the age of 10 at Watsessing Park from the Essex County Parks Commission. By his early teens, he was competing for the Bloomfield Catholic Lyceum. He attended grammar school at Sacred Heart and night school at Bloomfield High while working during the day. He earned a scholarship to Fordham University, where he also attended at night in order to work during the day to help support his family. There he earned the nickname "The Fordham Flyer."

In 1927, Gibson graduated from Fordham and then qualified for the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam, culminating a life-long dream. By 1940, he had moved up on Wall Street to become manager of a brokerage division. When the U.S. entered World War II, Gibson took a job with Westinghouse in Bloomfield, and worked on the Manhattan Project, which developed part of the Atomic Bomb.

"For more than 50 years, he would give generously of his time in the training and development of many Bloomfield High School athletes," his second eldest child Mrs. Pat Carter told *Bloomfield TAP*. "He never said no to any sincere or dedicated Bloomfield athlete. My dad also became an expert on the Leroy Mills system of kicking and developed all the kickers on the Bloomfield High football team in the 1930s and 1940s (during the legendary tenure of head coach Bill Foley)."

Following his running career, Gibson became an esteemed track official for major meets in the Eastern U.S., as well as the Millrose Games, Olympic trials and national championships. He would officiate through the late 1980s. From 1945–1972, Gibson was the track coach at Seton Hall College (now University). He would also coach and direct track clinics for the State Dept., as well as Amateur Athletic Union meets all over the world. In 2012, the track & field facility at Foley Field was named the **John A. Gibson Track & Field Complex** in his honor.

*SOURCE: Mike Lamberti, The Bloomfield TAP*