



The New Town Crier

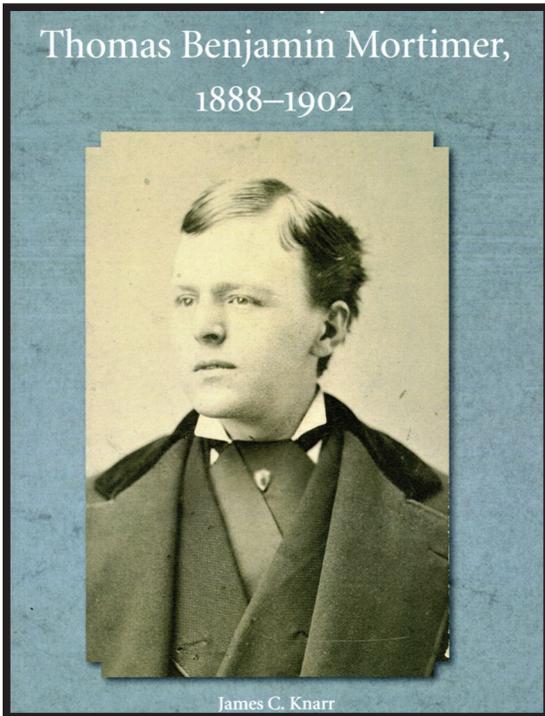
Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

October 2021

The Diary of Thomas Benjamin Mortimer, 1888–1902



The book titled *The Diary of Thomas Benjamin Mortimer, 1888–1902* was published privately earlier this year. The subject, Thomas Mortimer, worked at Oakes Mill in Bloomfield and talks a great deal about the Mill in his diary. *The New Town Crier* caught up with the author, James C. Knarr, at his home in Texas to ask about the publication of The Diary.

“Thomas was my great-great grandfather on my mother’s side,” explained Knarr.

“The family has passed down copies of his diary and that of another great-great grandfather, a Civil War veteran who lived in Paterson and Fairfield, through the generations. I work in academic publishing down here in Texas, so I am familiar with what it takes to publish something like this. I had been considering doing it for a few years,” he continued.

“Unfortunately, we lost three of my uncles in rapid succession recently. My mother is the only member of her immediate family left with us. I knew if I didn’t use her connections soon, I’d possibly lose direct access to the diaries.

“My mother was able to connect me to two of her cousins, Larry Reynolds in Caldwell and Bud Luihn in North Carolina, who maintained the family history, allowing me to fill in the genealogical gaps. Rich Rockwell, HSOB Trustee,

and Lisa Cohn at the Bloomfield Public Library, were also instrumental in helping me understand the Bloomfield context.

“Ultimately, I wanted to create a keepsake volume for my family, giving future generations access to our shared history, especially since the original diary will move farther and farther from them as time progresses,” concluded Knarr.

Alas, *The Diary of Thomas Benjamin Mortimer, 1888–1902* is not available for purchase, but readers can peruse a copy within the walls of the Bloomfield Public Library and the HSOB Museum (which has new hours, please see the back page for details). Knarr graciously donated copies to both institutions so that the history of this interesting Bloomfield citizen could be available to all. We thank him for his generous gift.

It is the hope of both the author and the HSOB that when the COVID-19 pandemic winds down, he will come up to Bloomfield and speak about his ancestor and the book’s research process during one of our meetings.

Mr. Knarr invites any questions or comments about his book. Email him at jay.knarr@gmail.com.



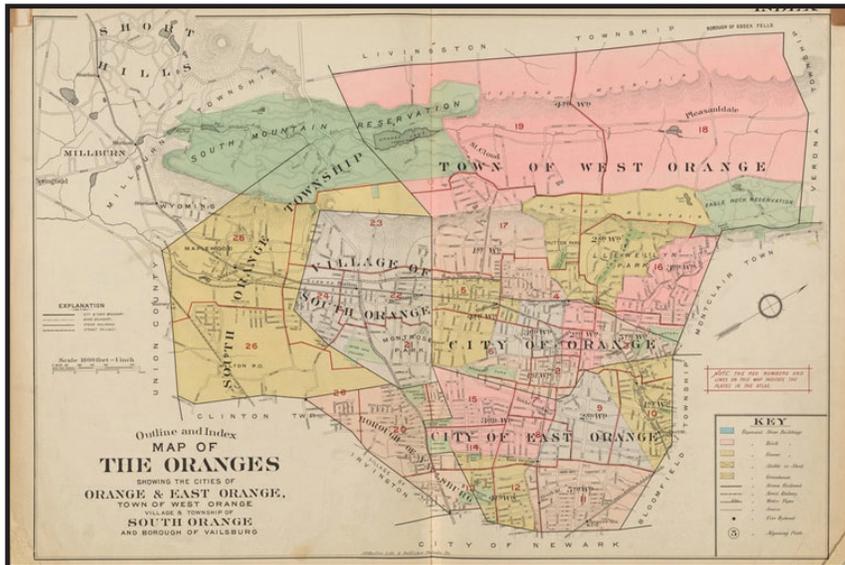
The houses Mortimer built are still standing at the corner of James and Spring Streets. He describes the construction of the (now) duplex house (at left) in his diary. He built the two-story, barn-shaped house at right later, around 1910, when his daughter’s family (the author’s great-grandparent’s family) needed more space.

“My grandmother grew up in the house on the right, 6 Spring Street,” explained book author James C. Knarr. “The Halloween decorations in this photo are modern accoutrements, I hope.”

Whatever happened to West Bloomfield, North Orange, New Orange and Orangefield?

By Joseph Fagan

The Oranges of Essex County have an interesting and curious name—but they are not associated with a popular Vitamin C fruit that makes juice. The obvious question also arises as to how come there is no town named North Orange?



The answer is not simple or short but certainly does have an interesting story dating back nearly three centuries. Most would be surprised to learn that a New Orange actually did once exist in New Jersey, but just not in Essex County. Equally surprising is that it pretended to be associated with the Oranges from the next county. Regardless of geographical location, the name of “Orange” and its associated towns have an interesting story to tell.

It was originally known as the “Mountain Society” and was first used by the settlers of the original Newark settlement of 1666. This land extended west from the Passaic River and, with subsequent land purchases from the Lenni-Lenape Indians, included most of present-day Essex County, New Jersey.

The name “Orangefield” was first used and adopted by the settlers in 1780 for an area of land west of Newark. The Orange prefix is reported to have been used in honor of Prince William of Orange, who was a familiar English name in the American Colonies.

It had been suggested that since the terrain had both mountains and valleys that the suffix “dale” be used instead of “field.” So, in 1782, the name of “Orangedale” was first used to designate the place of a church meeting. By 1790 the name was consistently being used in Newark town records and unofficially adopted. By 1796, the “dale” suffix was dropped without explanation and the area began to be simply referred to as “Orange.”



This 1962 reenactment shows the Township of Bloomfield being created by an act of the New Jersey Legislature on March 23, 1812.

Bloomfield originally was a large parcel of land extending west that essentially began a parallel history concurrent with the subsequent land separations of Orange.

Photo courtesy of the HSOB.

On November 27, 1806, Orange was established as a separate township under an act of the New Jersey State Legislature. It separated from the Newark Settlement and included all of the territory now encompassing all of the Oranges.

More towns eventually separated from the Town of Orange. South Orange was organized on January 26, 1861; Fairmount (later to become part of West Orange) on March 11, 1862; East Orange on March 4, 1863; and West Orange (including Fairmount) on March 14, 1863. Thus, all towns using Orange in the name in Essex County were created. Collectively, all of these bordering towns became known as the Oranges. Noticeably missing from this mix of Orange compass headings, however, was North Orange.

A few years after the establishment of Orange, another land separation from Newark occurred when the Township of Bloomfield was created by an act of the New Jersey Legislature on March 23, 1812. Bloomfield originally was a large parcel of land extending west that essentially began a parallel history concurrent with the subsequent land separations of Orange. The future towns of Belleville, Glen Ridge, Nutley and Montclair eventually were

carved out from the Bloomfield land. Today's Montclair was first known as Cranetown and then West Bloomfield. It became the Township of Montclair in 1868 and, even though it was geographically located north of Orange, it never took on the name of North Orange to link it with the rest of the Oranges. The naming choice might have been a wise decision so as not to be confused with an existing array of town names already associated with Orange.

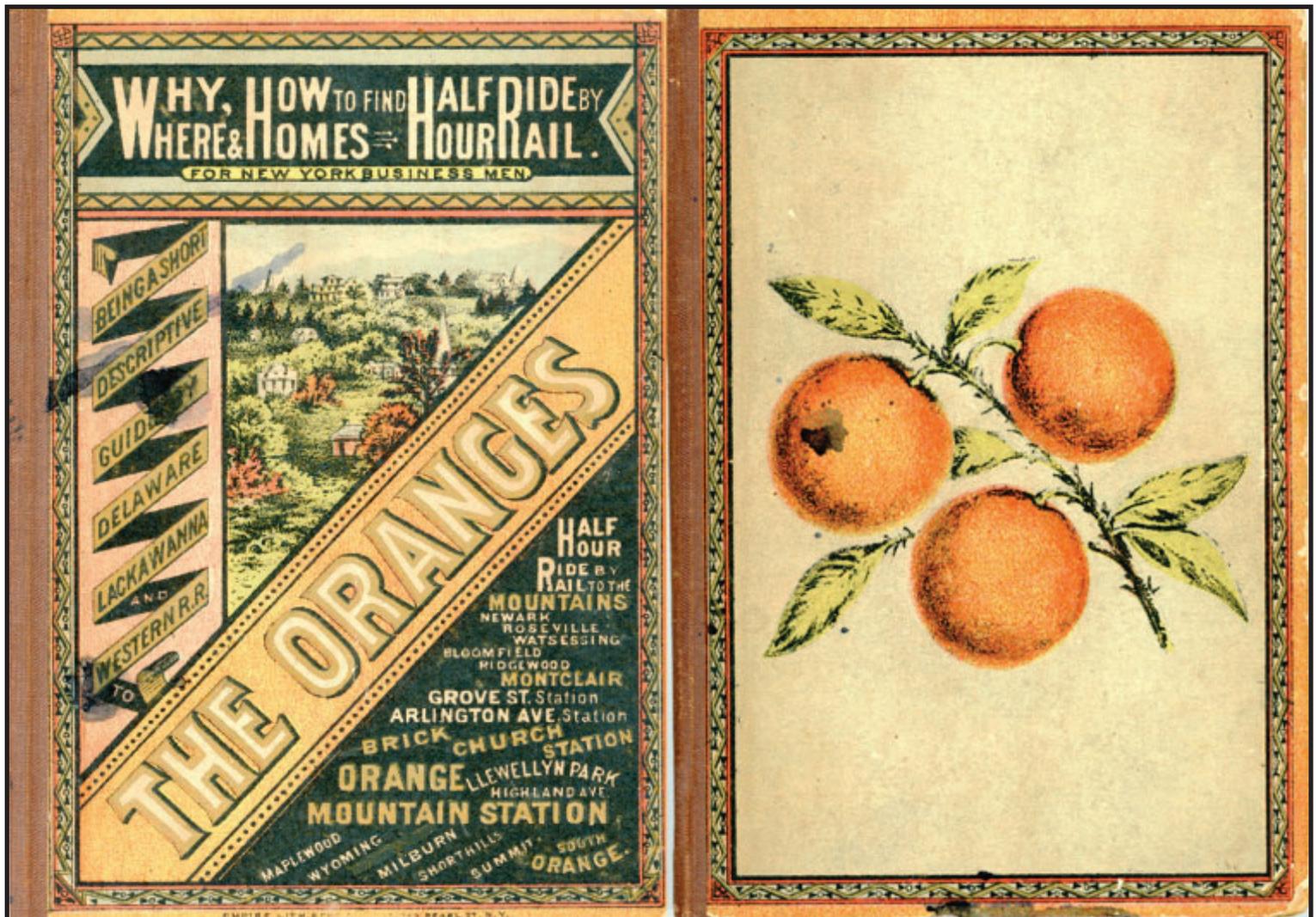
However, there once was a town in New Jersey named New Orange. In the late 1890s, the New Orange Industrial Association (NOIA) purchased land in Cranford and Union in current day Union County. NOIA intentionally named its town "New Orange" to be associated with the Oranges of Essex County. They believed if they associated their upcoming town with the well-known Oranges, it could help attract more investors and interest in the development of New Orange.

NOIA subdivided the land into building lots and sought out several large industries to come to their new town. They even convinced Upsala College, which was founded in 1893, to move from Brooklyn with an offer of cash and free land for its campus in New Orange.

The scheme worked for a while, but eventually caused too much confusion with the "real Oranges" of Essex County. In 1907, New Orange was incorporated as a borough and the name was changed to Kenilworth, as it remains today. Ironically, Upsala College, which had been relocated to New Orange from Brooklyn, relocated yet again to one of the "real Oranges" when it came to East Orange in 1924. The college eventually closed in 1995 due to declining enrollment combined with financial problems.

We often take for granted the names of places we know so well, but everything has a beginning. The reasoning of namesakes has more than three centuries of history that may be lost upon us today. History's enduring impact still survives and is reflected in the names of towns we travel through today, traversing the familiar roads of home.

Joseph Fagan is the Official Historian of the Township of West Orange and has written four books on the subject. He can be reached by e-mail at jfagan@westorange.org. Map & photo below courtesy of the Joseph Fagan Collection.





General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER

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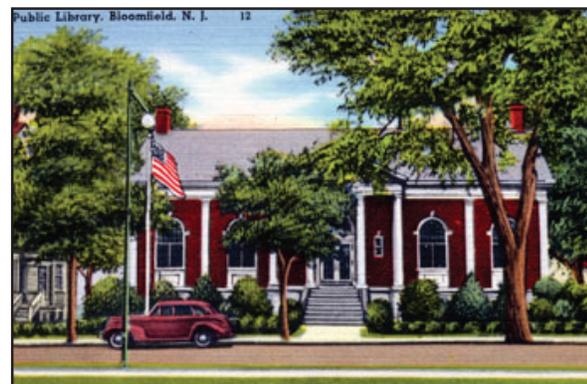
The Old Stone Schoolhouse

The Old Stone Schoolhouse was located at Broad Street on the southeast corner of Belleville Avenue. Built about 1803, it stood until 1849, when it merged with Central School.

Image courtesy of Van Tassel Funeral Home. Photo by Richard Rockwell.

The Museum has new hours!

Visit The HSOB Museum! Dedicated to the culture, people and history of Bloomfield, the HSOB Museum's collection consists of furniture, clothing & accessories, tools, household articles, paintings, toys, posters, memorabilia, dioramas, maps, newspapers, postcards, letters, deeds, documents, books and much more. Located on the 3rd floor of the Children's Library at 90 Broad Street, **NEW Museum hours** are Saturdays from 10:00am–2:00pm. PH: (973) 743-8844.



Welcome Mat

A cordial welcome is extended to the following new members of The Historical Society of Bloomfield. We hope to see you at our next meeting:

Linda Johns
Bloomfield

Kevin Kesby
Basking Ridge, NJ