



# The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter Of The Historical Society Of Bloomfield

Editor: Fredrick Branch

Design: Mark Scurman



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BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY, 07003

MARCH, 2002

## Notice Of March Meeting Save The Date: March 25th

### Author Bernard Olsen

#### "A Billy Yank Governor, The Life and Times of New Jersey's Franklin Murphy"

Second time author Bernard Olsen will be the guest speaker at the March 25th meeting of the Historical Society. Members of the Historical Society welcomed him at a previous meeting when he spoke about his first book, "Upon The Tented Field." "A Billy Yank Governor, The Life and Times of New Jersey's Franklin Murphy" is Mr. Olsen's second Civil War account.

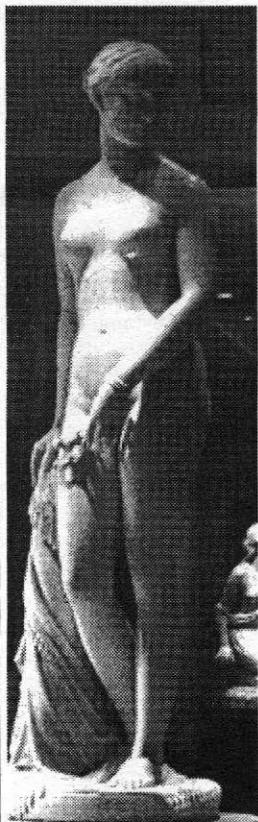
As New Jersey greets the winner of the first gubernatorial election of the 21st century, we will hear about the winner of the first gubernatorial election of the 20th century, Franklin Murphy, whose varied career as soldier, businessman, politician, New Jersey Governor and patron of the arts makes for a most interesting subject. But few New Jerseyans have ever heard of him. That is about to change when you join us for the March 25th meeting.

The meeting begins at 8:00 p.m. in the Civic Center.

## Governor Murphy's "Greek Slave"

Governor Murphy maintained a large 19th century townhouse in New Jersey's finest city, Newark. A private gallery attached to his home contained Murphy's prized collection of paintings and sculpture. Among them one of several copies of Hiram Power's "Greek Slave," probably the most successful classical marble sculpture of the 19th century. First shown at the New York Academy of Design, it became famous at the Crystal Palace in 1854.

Murphy eventually presented the "Greek Slave" to the Newark Museum, in 1926, where it continues to dominate The Museum's 19th century American Gallery in a specially constructed rotunda. Even as the original travelled all over the United States, the Newark copy returned to the Big Apple last year, where she was shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibit of 19th century American art, furnishings, and architectural drawings (among them sketches by Alexander Jackson Davis).



# Making The House A (Historic) Home



## The Croughan House Oak Street

by Patricia Post

Why Pay Rent. These words caught my eye as I read through the real estate ads in the spring of 1996. I was immediately in contact with the realtor and made an appointment to see the house. And charming it was; although a small example of the much larger Victorians that would eventually become popular in the late 1800's. It was charming enough for me to make a serious offer. I saw it as a fine example of Bloomfield's past; a slice of middle-class history—a history of the Croughan family of Oak Street.

The Croughans were apparently Irish immigrants who were determined to purchase land and a home in the New World. The spelling of the Croughan name would have different variations throughout history (i.e., Crogan, Croghan). Apparently, the land at 29 Oak Street was bought originally from Israel Ward by Thomas Crogan for \$207 (imagine that!) in June 1859. The property consisted of two lots, the original site of 29 Oak Street and the lot next door to the south. (Rumor has it that the lot to the south was purchased from the Croughans in the 1920's.) Thomas and Hanora Crogan, his wife, sold the property to Martin Crogan during April 1866. Martin Crogan, in turn, sold it to Patrick Croughan, and his wife, Mary Jane.

The property was sold once again in February 1868 at \$300 to John Croughan. Croughan was a hat manufacturer, who may have worked for the Ellors in the Watsessing section of Bloomfield. He married and had four children: Sara, Mary Agnes, John and Edward. Edward L. (grandfather to John Gibson, who has provided us with most of this information about the Croughan family history) purchased the property from his mother and remained living there until his death in 1956. Edward's wife, Catherine inherited the property, and in 1962 when she died, her son and daughter, Donald and Ruth, continued living in the family homestead. Donald died in 1991. A few years later, his sister Ruth became ill and

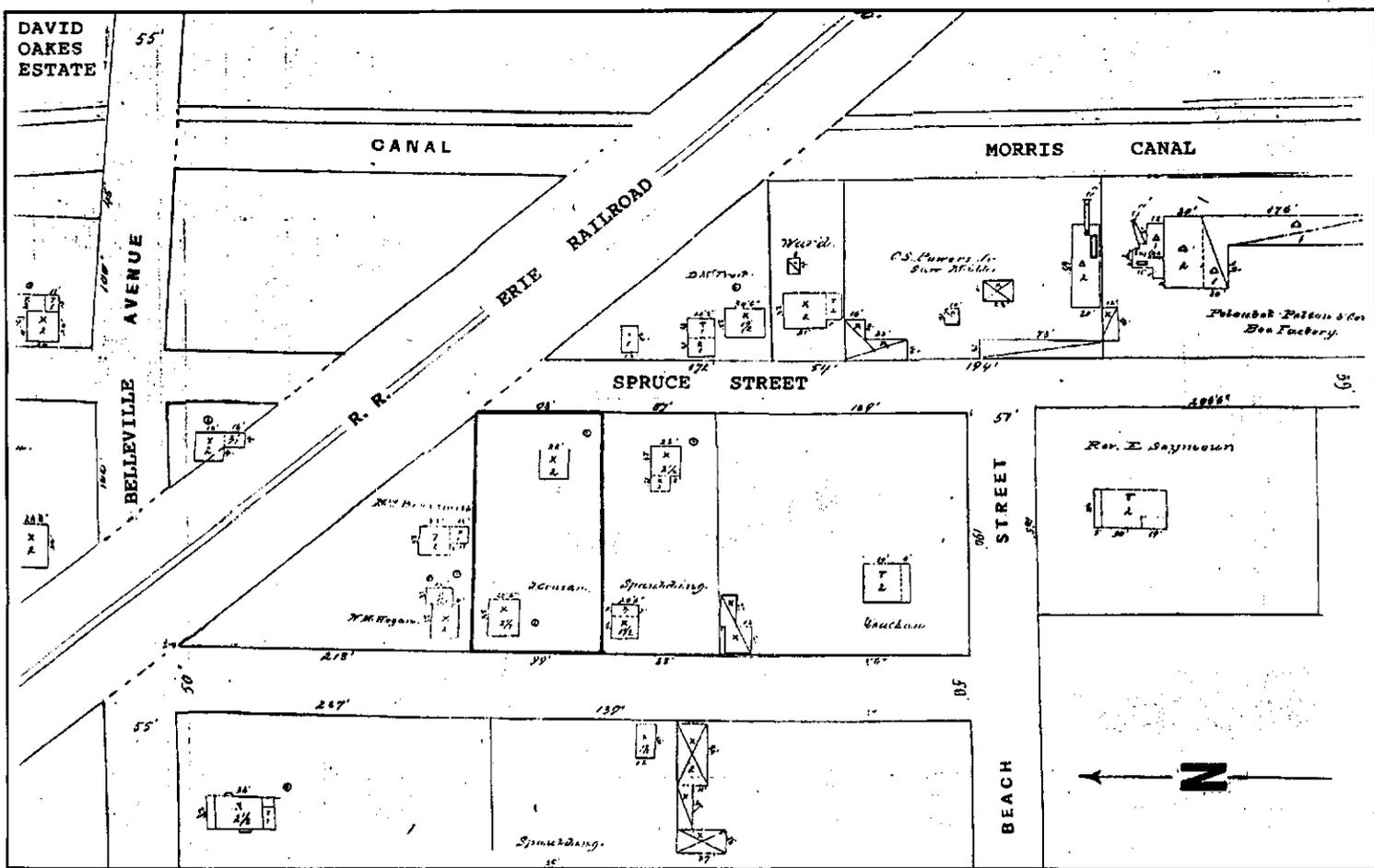
could no longer keep the house. And it was at this time that the house was put on the market and was purchased by me and co-owner, Lynne Skell.

Our house was apparently remodeled in the 1920's, when an extension was added to the dining room. It included a lovely stained-glass window, which adds to the charm of the house. There were three fireplaces at one time, two with a common chimney between the living room and kitchen and another in one of the bedrooms over the living room. Unfortunately, all of these fireplaces have been covered over, but a mantel does remain in the bedroom, as a reminder of the days before central heating. Another probable 1920's addition was a wraparound porch. As a final attempt to make the maintenance of the house easier, aluminum siding was applied to the outside and any remaining decorative details removed.

A second remodeling took place, I believe, probably in the 1960's, judging by some of the wallpaper. New windows were put in (except for the original 19th century arched one in the attic), and wall-to-wall carpeting was installed on the first floor, on the stairs and in the hall.

Though these changes may have made maintenance easier, they took away a little of the Victorian charm that must have existed so many years ago, but not enough to hide its Victorian origin. Thankfully, the original doors in the basement and upstairs are still in place, as is the arched window in the attic. Another original detail is the beautiful banister on the stairs...what lovely woodwork! I believe the original floors are still in the small bedroom (now used as a computer room) and in Lynne's bedroom. The entry also retains its original appearance with its double doors (complete with transom), long, narrow entry hall and steep stairs with a light fixture hanging from a chain, which years ago may have supported a small chandelier. You can almost picture a lady of the Victorian Era floating down the

(continued on next pg.)



## The Croughan House...

(continued from previous pg.)  
stairs in her long dress!

Lynne and I, as current owners, want to go even further and restore the full Victorian panache this house must have had. Our plan is to take up all of the carpeting and restore the hardwood floors to their original condition. We would also like to uncover the fireplaces, and, if we really feel ambitious, remove the aluminum siding to see what is underneath (although, Fred Branch says we may be opening up a can of worms!). It is rumored that there may be shingles underneath. If what we find under the metal siding is not a nightmare, we could restore the old-time charm to 29 Oak Street by adding Victorian decorative details and paint colors.

I am sure that 29 Oak Street was special to the Croughan family, as it shows in the way they took care of its maintenance through the many years they lived there. Just the fact that it survives in Bloomfield after the passing of 142 years and has not met the fate of so many other houses of that era, makes it special to me. It is a small piece of middle-class history of a time in Bloomfield that, unfortunately is long gone, but certainly not forgotten. A piece of our heritage still lives on at 29 Oak Street.

## President's Message

We need more people to be aware of the Society and our museum. Today I want to thank those who are helping us make our presence known.

Mr. William Icklan, Director of the Bloomfield Public Library, invited the Society to make use of one of the exhibit cases in the entrance lobby of the Library. Over the holidays we displayed a poster with a reproduction of a painting by a local artist, Anna Lindner, surrounded by old Christmas cards and antique toys. Next we will feature Herbert Fisher's pen-and-ink drawings of historic sites, most or all of which have been demolished. Fisher's superb drawings appeared along with related articles he wrote for the Independent Press, which were published in 1961 and 1962. Photocopies of the articles are available to be read in the Reference Department of the Library and in the Museum. Jean Kuras, Recording Secretary, and I work on creating these exhibits.

The local papers are giving our publicity good coverage. For that we thank Walter Elliott, Staff Writer of the Independent Press, and Steve Galvacky, Editor of Bloomfield Life. Dorothy Johnson writes most of our publicity sent to the papers.

We can all be thankful that Fred Branch, as Editor, with the assistance of Mark Scurman as Design Editor, has revived the original newsletter of the Society as "The New Town Crier." He and contributing writers give us news of programs, new projects, and interesting facts from the town's past.

And we thank all members who tell their friends and neighbors about the Society and the Museum.

*Ina Campbell, President,  
Historical Society of Bloomfield*

## The Croughans' Neighborhood from the Bloomfield map of 1888.

There were many complaints about this map when it finally appeared. Not only was it too long in the works, but was considered to be a botched job on the part of the cartographers. There are many examples of sloppy work, mostly in the spelling of the names of property owners ("Metz" is spelled "Mitts") and even the Croughans found themselves rechristened "Crusan."

The above portion shows the area around the Croughan property (heavily outlined) which is almost in the center. The street is not named at all, although earlier maps provide this simple information. The Greenwood Lake Branch of the Erie Railroad, which slashes through the upper left corner, was opened in 1872. Before the 12-foot embankment was built, the Croughans had a view of the Oakes villa, which had been built in the upper left corner (not shown on map) in 1853.

The little house on the triangle at the corner of Spruce and Belleville Avenue remained there in derelict condition until razed in 1932. It had been the Flannery home, and it was in this small house that Peter Flannery had been born on September 27, 1854. His two older brothers served in the Union Army during the Civil War. Peter married Mary Cullen of Hickory Street in Saint Peter's Church, Belleville, in 1874. (Bloomfield, West Bloomfield, Lyndhurst, Nutley, and part of Woodside were in the Diocese of Saint Peter's until 1878.) He was employed by the Thomas Oakes Company for 55 years until his death in 1947, 20 years after his retirement.

The Reverend Seymour's Academy stood on the north side of Belleville Avenue where the railroad bridge was constructed. Part of the Academy building, said to have been used as an early railroad station, stands just east of the tracks. Reverend Seymour moved to a large house at the corner of Beach and Spruce (still standing today). A.B. Pelouet was the owner of this house near the boat yard on the Morris Canal in partnership with a Mr. Wharry in 1856. The boat yard later became the box factory for the Pelton Pelouet Organ Company. The house had been sold to the Reverend Ebenezer Seymour, where he lived in retirement until his death in 1871. Just east of the Seymour residence, at the edge of the Morris Canal, were the C.S. Powers Saw Mill and the box factory. It could not have been a quiet neighborhood.

Just west of Oak Street was the extensive estate of James C. Beach (shown as belonging to "Spaulding"). The buildings marked "x" were barns and stables belonging to Mr. Beach. These structures remained until the early 1930's, several years after the Beach mansion at the corner of Beach and Elm had been demolished. It is possible that Oak Street may have had its beginning as an unpaved driveway from Beach Street and Belleville Avenue as an access road to these barns for Mr. Beach's carriages and horses.

The many small circles scattered throughout the neighborhood (tinted blue on the original map), are wells, a necessity before Bloomfield had a city water supply.

NB. The "north" arrow does not point in that exact direction.

# ROYAL MEMORIES

by Jean Kuras

On a bitterly cold day early last year, we made our way to the Royal Theater on invitation from the town. There was history there and the place was scheduled for demolition on its way to becoming a parking lot.

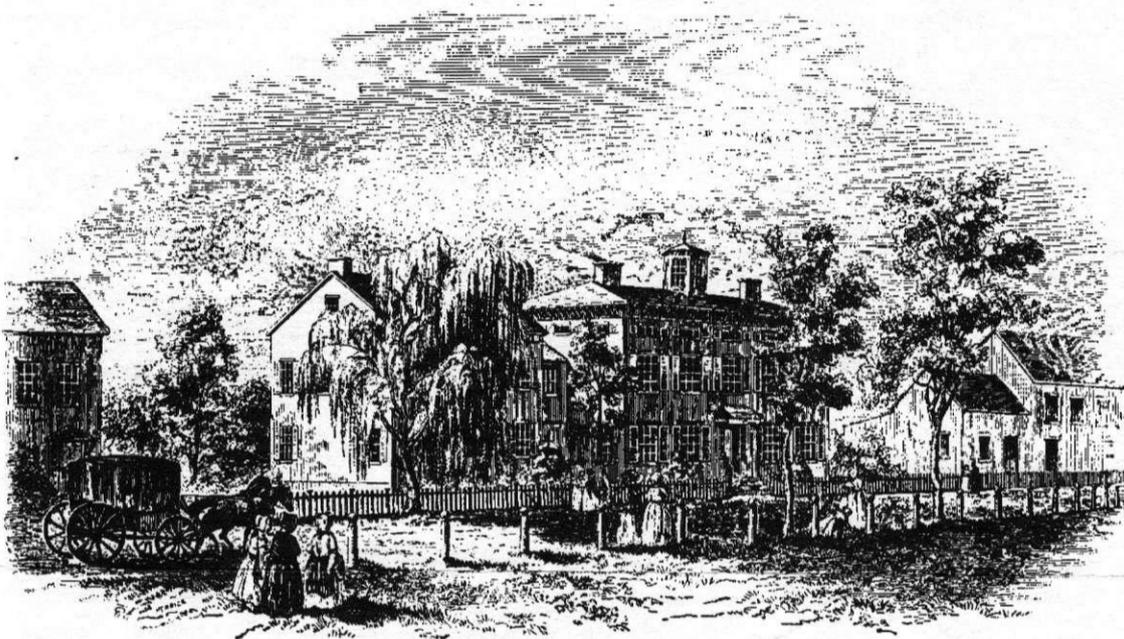
We walked through the lobby, passing the old snack bar. No tantalizing smell of popcorn. No jewel-colored Jujubes under fluorescent lights. No silver wrapped Chunkys pushed across this dusty, cracked counter.

Picking our way over piles of pipes, sacks of debris and filthy carpet, we entered the theater. In the semi-darkness, the seats, all in place, appeared to be in good shape. Behind the large screen, a platform stage appeared. The painted blue and gold twisted columns remained surprisingly bright, the orchestra pit and backstage dressing rooms were a jolting reminder of the vaudeville acts that once entertained here. The basement with its broken windows and rusted pipes was under several feet of water, certainly not available for inspection.

We rescued a stack of signs announcing ticket prices—a low of 35 cents!—, several attached seats and examples of the plaster work that once adorned the theater to take back to the museum. More than 50 years ago, Fred's uncle designed and made the plaster art, once painted in bright hues, now greatly faded. In one of the theater's renovations, the Baroque Classical pieces depicting cupids, scrollwork, women's faces, fruits and leaves, had been covered over with anonymous sheetrock. Following completion of the Royal Theater work, the Belleville studio went on to design pieces for New York's Roxy Theater.

As we trudged back to our cars with the Royal memorabilia, nostalgia prompted a tear or two, or was that just the chilling wintry wind?

Royal visitors: Frederick Branch, Ina Campbell, Peter Cullen, Jean Kuras, Alan Slaughter.



BLOOMFIELD FEMALE SEMINARY  
MADAME COOKE'S SCHOOL (1856)

## The Distinguished "Madame Cook"

by Jean Kuras

Her final resting place is on a hillside in Bloomfield Cemetery. Above, a bright blue sky is seen through a tall, leafless oak tree. The inscription tells us her name was Harriet B. Latimer, wife of Milo Cooke, born May 23, 1785 and died January 28, 1862. At the base of the tall spire-shaped marker is carved "RESURGEMUS."

In 1836, this remarkable woman, well educated, of decisive character, deeply pious and possessing notable executive skills came to Bloomfield. She had previously taught in Vermont and Augusta, Georgia and would now become the principal of the Bloomfield Female Seminary. From 1837 to 1855, her seminar school in Bloomfield was the center of a strong intellectual and religious influence. Under her guidance, the school's distinction grew and was often referred to as Madame Cooke's School.

A building facing the Green, on the site of today's Children's Library, was erected for the splendid sum of \$6000 at the urging of a group of men who wished their daughters to have the same educational opportunities as their sons. The two-and-a-half-story building in the Greek Revival style was considered a grand establishment for its time.

Widowed for many years, Madame Cooke, as she was called, lived with her son and his family in a two-story New England Georgian house, just south of the school, where Sacred Heart Church stands today.

The school achieved a wide celebrity and many young ladies came a long distance to attend the seminary as day students or boarders. Her students both respected and loved her. Revivals were often held on the school grounds and former students would return again to reminisce about their old school days. The girls sold handmade items at the end of summer term. Boxes of clothing were collected and both money and clothing were sent to missionaries. In the 18 years of the school's existence, several thousand dollars would be raised for mission work. In her book, "Memories of My Life Work," Mrs. Cooke relates that 16 of her students and teachers became missionaries and many others became teachers and home missionaries. More than 1800 students would obtain their education in Madame Cooke's School.

When Madame Cooke could no longer continue in her work, her son Robert took over the school. When she died, he went on for a while but enrollment steadily decreased. The early free public schools had an aristocratic prejudice to overcome but they successfully grew in popularity and reputation. Finally public schools dominated the private schools in the matter of children's education.

After the Bloomfield Female Seminary ended as a school, the buildings became the Park House kept by Ichabod W. Howell. In 1888, Judge Amzi Dodd, whose name would later become the Community House, bought the old seminary building and created a lawn on its site. One of the buildings was moved to State Street.

Madame Harriet B. Cooke was a woman whose strong character, intellect and determination influenced leaders, scholars and town families. The time of the academies was a bright period in Bloomfield history and she was an important figure in it.

## Reminiscing

Compiled by Jean Kuras

"I went years ago with my children. The manager was so great. When we were ready to leave, he'd get up on the stage and say, 'Make sure you remember everything before you leave—boots, umbrellas, children!' It was very nice."

—Amy Krush

"When I was in elementary school—Brookside—we went there every Saturday and we saw double features along with the news. We had a wonderful time and it was relatively inexpensive."

—Dick West

"This was Depression in 1937. The Royal was buying shoelaces for 50 cents and shoes for \$5. If you were the first to say, 'OK Royal!' you'd get the money. One man ran up with his shoes and came back to face his daughter who said, 'Oh, Dad! Why did you make such a fool of yourself?' He said, 'I could go next door to Thom McAn and buy a new pair for \$4.95!'"

—Frederick Branch

"I saw 'High Noon' there. It was 1957. I must have been 10 or 11. It looked like a jewel on the ceiling, a big oval light. The lights would dim and they had colored panels. It looked like stained glass."

—Steve Miller

"My first horror movie was introduced to me at The Royal Theater. As they ushered us kids into the seats, they were handing everyone 'barf bags.' The movie was billed as 'so horrific, those with squeamish stomachs may need to exit the building.' It was quite a gimmick. I don't remember the name of the movie, but I do recall eating my popcorn very slowly."

—Mark Sceurman

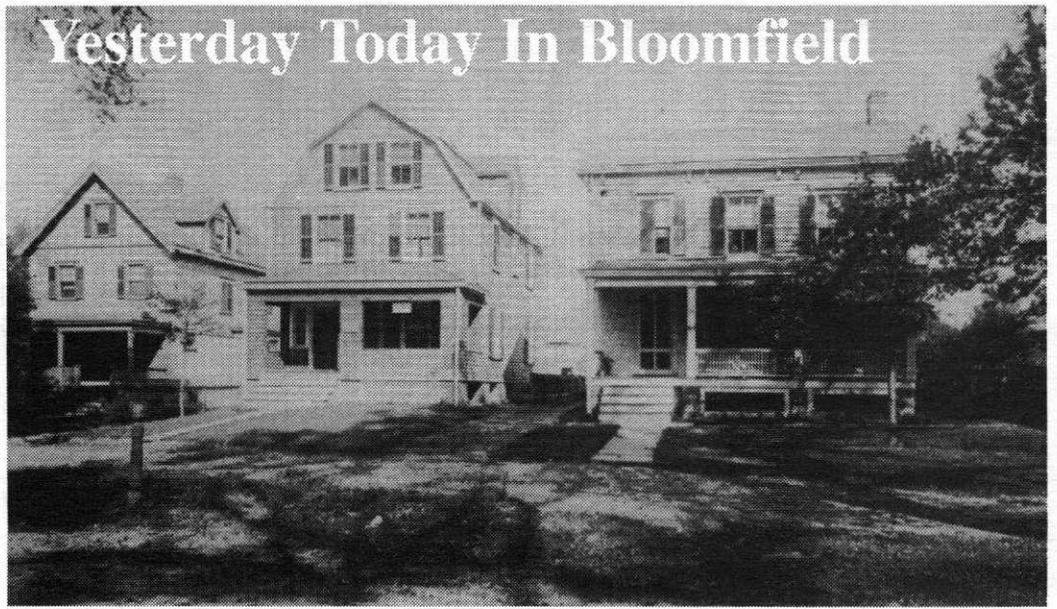
# Editorial

by Frederick Branch

We had so much copy for this issue (and a lot more that had to be held over until next time) that we thought a double-size newsletter might be in order. Please let us know if you like this new format and we will see if The Society can afford to do it again.

My sincere thanks to everyone who helped out with this issue, particularly Patricia Post, John Gibson, Helen Flannery, Ina Campbell, Jean Kuras, and, of course, Mark Scourman, who took time out from 3 a.m. bottles to reassure the nervous editor that all would be well.

The Society Board has agreed to award anyone providing your editor with special help an honorary year's membership in the Historical Society. We are particularly grateful to Helen Flannery (a fellow member of BHS Class of 1943) for giving up an entire afternoon to talk about her family and the good old days.



**Due to years of neglect, this house (center) on Bay Avenue has recently been demolished. This picture, taken in 1912 shows that Bay Avenue was unpaved, and the property on these homes was extended to the street more than they are today. Note the hitching post on the left. The home on the right was owned by one of the original Morris families, hence the name for this section of Bloomfield called "The Morris Neighborhood."**

## From The Cemetery Archives

by Barbara Vydro

Recent research into the book of minutes, kept by the secretary of the Cemetery Board between 1870-90 in beautiful Spencerian script, has provided documentation of some important history. The entries are unfortunately brief, leaving the reader wishing for more details, as they almost tell us what we want to know...but not quite.

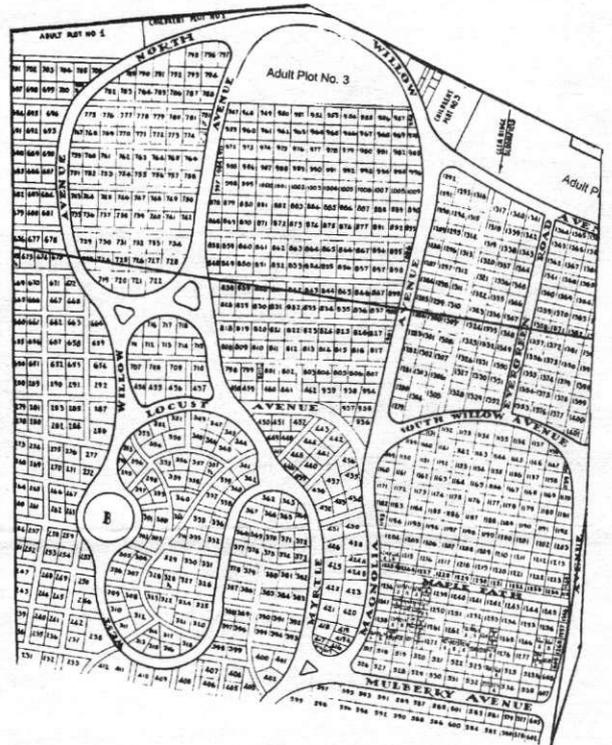
However, the November, 1870 meeting of the committee of three (Peloubet, Davis, and Oakes) at the home of Doctor Joseph Austin Davis at 425 Franklin Street (demolished in 1945), mentions that "Professor Davis of New York" had been contacted about the design of a

building and gates to be erected at the southeast corner, now the site of the 1909 structure described and illustrated in our issues of May, 2001 and September, 2001.

Further research into the archives by Cemetery Manager Barbara Vydro has disclosed that "Professor Davis" (Alexander Jackson Davis 1803-1892) was also requested to lay out the property to the north: twenty acres purchased in 1853 from the Ball family, who had given the original five acres in 1796.

A map of the cemetery shows a noticeable difference in the pattern of carriage drives and pathways in the new portion, located just above "Division Path." Davis called upon the land-

scaping principles he had acquired from Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852) to arrange the gracefully curving lines of "Magnolia Avenue," "Myrtle Avenue," and "West Willow Avenue" to conform with the sloping contours of the natural landscape. Davis was probably responsible for the planting of trees and shrubs in naturalistic-looking groups as he did in Llewellyn Park, West Orange, which he designed for the Park's founder and owner, Llewellyn Haskell. Although Davis' participation in the plan of Bloomfield Cemetery had been suspected, and was mentioned in this connection during the tour of last October, written proof of this has finally been found.



**A glance at the map of this portion of The Cemetery shows a noticeable departure from the haphazard grid of roads and gravesites next to Belleville Avenue at the entrance gate.**



General Joseph Bloomfield  
THE NEW TOWN CRIER  
90 Broad Street  
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

### OFFICERS

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**Mary Wilbert**, Vice President  
**Audrey Moore**, Treasurer  
**Jean Kuras**, Recording Secretary  
**Emma Lou Czarnecki**, Corresponding Secretary  
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**Lucy Sant Ambrogio**

### IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

**Richard West**

## 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.

Mrs. Evelyn Padalino,  
Llewellyn Park,  
West Orange, N.J.

Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas and  
Betty Babicz, Toms River,  
N.J. 08753

Mr. and Mrs. Paul and Isa  
Allersmeyer, Bloomfield,  
N.J. 07003

Suzann B. Bently,  
Bloomfield, N.J. 07003

Ms. Betty Sjogren,  
Bloomfield, N.J. 07003

Karen Rosenberger,  
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Mr. and Mrs. Joseph  
and Mary Testa, Jr.,  
Bloomfield, N.J. 07003

Mr. Paul Russo,  
Bloomfield, N.J. 07003

Mr. and Mrs.  
Frank and Mary Lee  
Ciminiello,  
25 Maple Street,  
Bloomfield, N.J. 07003

Helen Flannery  
131 Evans Road  
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

### Excerpts from the Minute Book of Board of Director meetings.

Bloomfield, November 28, 1870

"Resolved that the committee [of Thomas] Oakes, [Doctor Joseph Austin] Davis, and [Chabrier] Peloubet be instructed to procure gate posts and gate after the plan of Professor [Alexander Jackson] Davis, architect of New York, provided the whole does not exceed six hundred dollars. Also to get a plan for the Reception Building\*. Adjourned to call of committee. C. Peloubet, Secretary.

"June 13, 1881. Passed a bill for money paid by Doctor Davis for plans for gatehouse and [sandstone] posts and service of Alexander [Jackson] Davis in laying out the grounds 30 dollars which the treasurer [Chabrier Peloubet] was instructed to pay him."

\*Although called "the Chapel" in later years, probably because of its church-like Gothic architecture, this building was not intended to be used for religious purposes. The Cemetery Committee specifically requested a "reception room, office, and toolhouse." Nor was the building used for meetings of the Cemetery Committee. As far as is known, it had no provision for heating, and The Committee paid rent for a meeting room over Horace Dodd's store long after the building was completed.

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or call us at: 973-566-6220