



# The Bloomfield Historian

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

OCTOBER 2025

## SAVE THE DATE

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

### BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER

84 Broad Street, Bloomfield, NJ

7:30pm

### Oakes Mill, Oakes Pond & The Oakes Family

Presented by  
Richard Rockwell

What was it like to work in a wool mill in the early 1900s, or for that matter, to own the wool mill?

Learn about the Oakes Mill's history in Bloomfield that ranges from when David Oakes built a single-room mill making yarn when he was 21 to a 30-acre campus of industrial buildings known nationally for its Oakes Blue wool that was used to make Civil War uniforms. You'll see photos and maps from the Historical Society's archives of the early days of the mill, the pond, the Oakes family and two generations of their Oakeside mansions on Belleville Avenue.



## Goodbye, Big Red

### Bloomfield loses historic tree

On August 7, 2025, Bloomfield High School, and the entire township, witnessed the removal of "Big Red," the purple beech tree that had graced the northeast corner of BHS for over a century. The tree was dying and couldn't be saved.

Planted on May 6, 1919 to commemorate the end of World War One, Big Red has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of BHS students. In 2019, a 100-year birthday celebration was held for the high school's beloved tree. Read more about Big Red at <https://bloomfieldhistorical.org/towncrier/may2019>.



Top Photo by Caroline Hayes  
Bottom Photos by Jerry Simon

# Jersey Girl: Bloomfield resident Connie Francis

December 12, 1937–July 16, 2025

Singer, musician, author and actor Connie Francis (Concetta Rosa Maria Franconero) was born in the Ironbound section of Newark, NJ. She attended Newark Arts High School in 1951–1952 before she and her family moved to Belleville, where she graduated as salutatorian from Belleville High School in 1955. The family eventually moved to Bloomfield, living on Dalebrook Road, off of Huck Road.

Francis rose to fame in 1958 with her cover of the 1923 song “Who’s Sorry Now?” which was followed by various other Top10 hits. She became the first woman to reach No. 1 on the *U.S. Billboard Hot 100* chart when “Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool” topped the chart in 1960. She was also the first woman to achieve three No. 1 hits on the chart, among her 53 career entries. Before the advent of the British Invasion, Francis was the most popular female vocalist in the U.S. between 1958 and 1964. She died this summer in Pompano Beach, FL.

Pictured, Connie Francis walks down Broad Street by Brookside Park alongside singer/songwriter Tony Randazzo in this publicity photo (now an Alamy stock photo). It was taken at the height of her career, right after recording her biggest hit, “Where The Boys Are.”

Below are some remembrances from the HSOB Facebook page:

–When I was in North Junior High a long time ago, a friend and I took a walk past her home (at the time) near the school. There was a person taking pictures of her, making like she was cutting her lawn. We watched and even had our picture taken with [Connie Francis]. She invited us in and showed us her room with her many stuffed animals. Our picture with her didn’t make it into the paper, but hers did. [It was] such an exciting thing to happen to us.



–[I] loved her. She used to give us lemonade while watching us play ball at [North Junior High School]. [I] cut her lawn.

–I met Connie Francis once with her brother George Franconero Jr., [whom] I played poker with. He was a disbarred lawyer, unbeknownst to me, who was an informant to the FBI about the mob. We had played cards at his home on Sunday night in March 1981 and the following Friday he was murdered [while] scraping ice off his car in his driveway, shot in the head. Case never solved. Their father, George Sr., was a really tough old guy who I’d see daily in Irv’s Soda Shop on the corner of Broad St. and Sunset Avenue, where he would bet the horses. It’s said that he went after Bobby Darin with a gun to stay away from his daughter and I can believe it. Memories from long ago...

## The 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:

Jean Duncan  
Bloomfield

Ashley Kurbanoglu  
Bloomfield

Carole & Anthony Turi  
Caldwell, NJ



## Museum Acquisitions: Portraits of Miss Roseanna

Roseanna Smith, who passed away on May 3, 2017 at the age of 85, was a lifelong Bloomfield resident. Most will remember her as “Miss Roseanna,” dance teacher to thousands of youngsters at **Miss Roseanna’s School of Dance**, located at 403 Broad Street (she was also an elder at Watchung Presbyterian Church, according to her obituary).

Smith started the school in 1948 and retired in 2015. Former student Katie Hickey came back to work for Miss Roseanna in 2005 and took over the business in 2015, renaming it Shooting Star Dance Center. When the school recently moved to 147 Broad Street, Hickey donated these beautiful portraits of Smith to the HSOB Museum. We thank her very much for this gracious donation.

The paintings are signed “Carlan Studio ‘52” and were most likely produced by Carlan Studio of Union, NJ, which is no longer in business (the owner—Richard J. Glasser—retired in 2002 and died in 2012).

Please visit the HSOB Museum at 90 Broad St. to view these paintings—and all of our collections. Hours are posted at [www.HSOB.org](http://www.HSOB.org).

### *A rite of passage*

Many, many Bloomfield children passed through the doors of Miss Roseanna’s at one time or another, including HSOB Vice President Mark Scurman, who reminisces:

—A funny story—even I went to Miss Roseanna’s School of Dance for one lesson. When I was about six years old, I watched Sammy Davis Jr. on TV tap dancing. I thought it was really cool. My mom asked me if I’d like to learn, so she sent me to Miss Roseanna’s. When I found out it was all girls, I never went back. I haven’t thought of that story in 62 years!





*General Joseph Bloomfield*

### **THE BLOOMFIELD HISTORIAN**

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF  
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF BLOOMFIELD

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#### **WEBMASTER**

Richard Rockwell

## **Memories of the Great Depression**

These three glum friends sit on the front step of 20 Davey Street around 1937—for the last time. The shabby pick-up truck is loaded with the family's few possessions and is almost ready for the trip to the new apartment in North Newark. We all got a ride to the new location—a minuscule apartment, fragrant with the beer fumes that percolated through the floor from the noisy tavern below. The family was obviously moving down in the world, and this was the best they could afford.

Of course, my brother and I promised faithfully to “keep in touch” with our friend Joe, but it was painfully obvious that we were never going down to that ramshackle neighborhood in Newark, even if we could afford the dime car-fair.

This photo brings home the hopelessness and tragedy of the 1930s and the Great Depression. We never saw our friend Joe again.  
~ **Fred Branch**

From left to right: Frederick Branch, Richard Branch, dog (name forgotten) and Joseph Letendre. Frederick Branch, *Editor Emeritus* of the *Bloomfield Historian*, died in 2018. This editor could find no record of his friend Joseph Letendre (or Letender), especially as Branch himself was unsure of the spelling of the last name or if Joe actually lived on Davey Street or rather a nearby street. Please contact the HSOB at [info@HSOB.org](mailto:info@HSOB.org) if you have any knowledge of Joseph Letendre or his family.



## **NEW! The Pilger Photo Collection 1893–1899**

These photographs capture the Pilger family of Bloomfield at the turn of the twentieth century, offering a glimpse into their home life, Berkeley Avenue neighborhood and lasting ties to the community. Click [HERE](#) to visit the Pilgers at home.