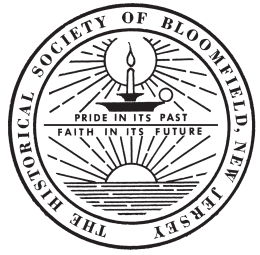




The New Town Crier

Official Newsletter of the Historical Society of Bloomfield



BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY 07003

NOVEMBER 2006

MEETING

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28
8:00 PM
at the
BLOOMFIELD CIVIC CENTER
84 Broad Street, Bloomfield

Gary Saretzky

*A Photography
Program:
Margaret
Bourke-White*

Mr. Gary Saretzky, archivist of Monmouth County, photographer, and educator, will present a power point program about Bourke-White at the Historical Society of Bloomfield Meeting on November 28, 2006, at 8:00 P.M.

Mr. Saretzky, who researched Burke-White's papers at Syracuse University, was guest curator for the recent six months exhibit: "Margaret Bourke-White: In Print", at Alexander Library, Rutgers University. His article on the photographer's first book, EYES ON RUSSIA, appeared in THE PHOTO REVIEW, and is the basis of his presentation on November 28th.

Gary is currently compiling a directory of 3,000 19th century photographs of New Jersey. He also served as Coordinator of Internship Programs for the Rutgers History Department. From 1977 to 2005, he taught the history of photography at Mercer County Community College. He holds a B.A. in History and American History, a B.A. in Photography and exhibits his photographs regularly.

This program is offered through the Horizons Speakers Bureau of the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. It is free and open to the public. This program will be presented at the Historical Society of Bloomfield meeting, November 28, 2006, at the Bloomfield Civic Center, 84 Broad Street. Parking is behind the Civic Center, off State Street.



AN EARLY 20th CENTURY CHRISTMAS



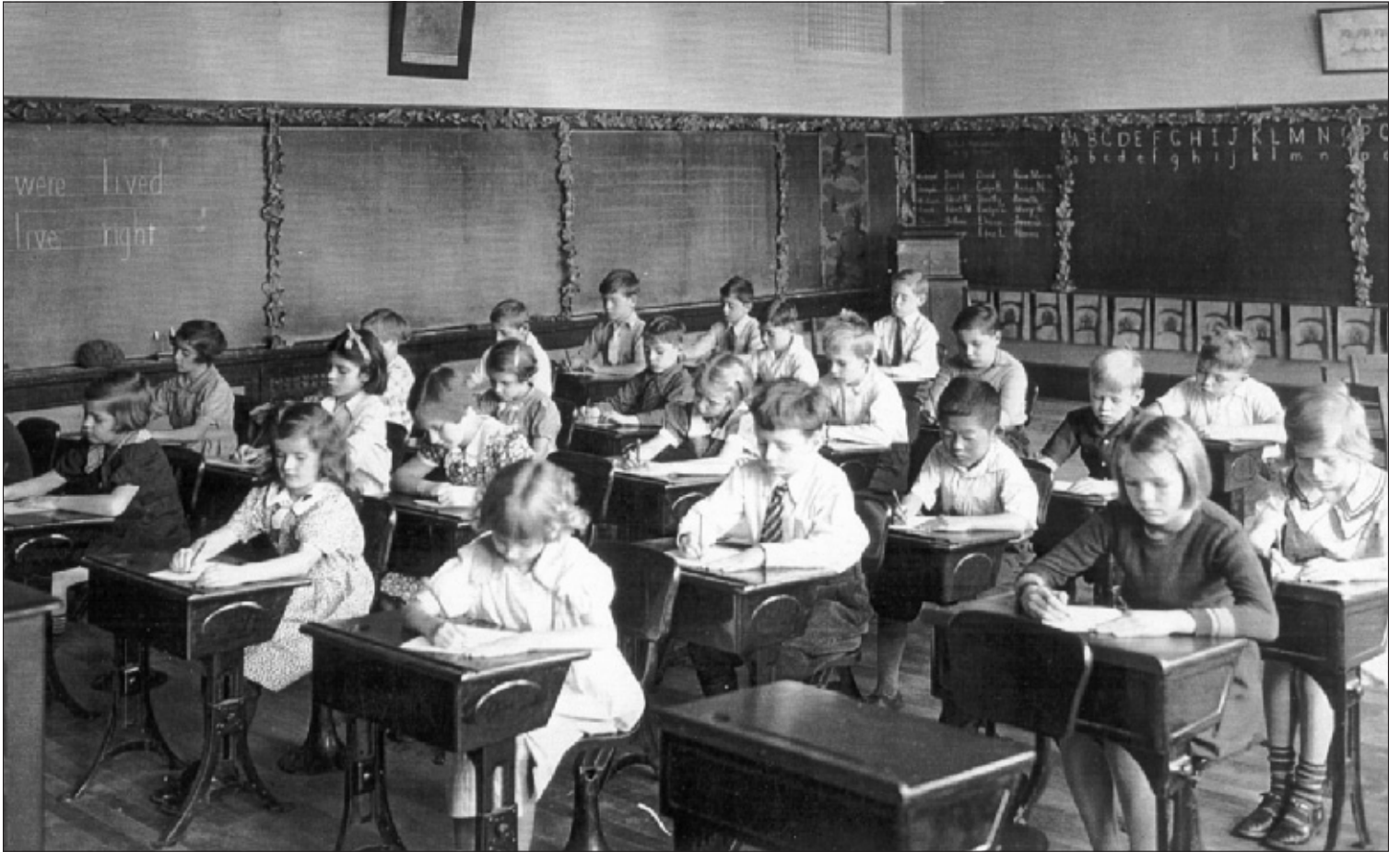
Back in 1925, the living room in the photo reproduced here would have been considered the very last word in upper middle-class interior design as advocated by the glossy decorating magazines of the period. The house stood (and still stands) at 33 Forest Drive, which was then a new street extending for a very short distance into the woods on the estate of Doctor Harvey Underwood, who had recently purchased it for development from Mrs. Abby Stafford. Until recently, the house had the distinction, among several others in town, of having been occupied continuously by the same family until the death of the last surviving family member.

Here we see the living room fireplace and the early 1900's furniture as it was on the first Christmas its new and proud owners lived there. It is a Christmas card sent out to their family and friends by Theodore and Grace Haroth Eichorn of Jersey City from their new home "out in the country". What can be seen in this photo that is typical of more than 75 years ago? Most noticeable is the sofa table to the right, carefully placed at the fashionable "skewed" angle of the twenties. The professional photographer deliberately set up his camera to include this prized piece of furniture, even though it placed the fireplace off-center. A Dresden lamp and photograph of the couple's only child, Shirley (1924-2004) are prominently displayed on the table, as is a metal etagiere to the left of the fireplace. The flowered draperies, with their ornate brackets, which obviously prevent them from being drawn over the casement windows, were also in the latest taste.

For her first Christmas in Bloomfield, Mrs. Eichorn chose to deck her halls with a cluster of papier-mache bells covered with tinfoil and highlighted with plaster snow (sparkling with mica flakes), hanging by red ribbons from the electrolier. Red wax candles brightened the brass candlesticks, a pinecone wreath was centered over the clock, and piles of spruce branches on the mantel, festooned with metal foil "rain" twinkled in the slightest breeze.

(Continued on page 2)

Fairview School, 1937



Many thanks to Mrs. Jane Johnson Maciag of Orchard Street who contributed this superb photo of what is believed to be the 5th grade class of Fairview School, 1937. Jane's late brother, Donald Johnson, is second row from the right, second desk. Others (also deceased) who are recognizable are Richard Branch, fourth desk, third row, and Arthur Swerdlow just behind Richard. And in the week of October 10 we received the sad news of the death of Barbara Siver Schmidt, to Donald's right in the fourth row.

When this photo was enlarged to 9 ¼ inches by 13 ¼ inches, a great many details were apparent. A glance around the room revealed other details such as the blackboards wreathed with real colored leaves, probably gathered by the children on their twice-daily walks to and from school, suggesting a date for the photograph of mid-October. There is a hand-wound acoustic Victrola in the far corner that dates from the 1920's. The four dinky light bulbs hung too high above the floor must have provided very little light on rainy days. The kids may have been tipped off in advance that their photos would be taken, because each is wearing their next-to-best clothing. ("Very best" would have been reserved for Sunday school.) The name of the invisible teacher is unknown.



An Early 20th Century Christmas (continued from page 1)

Some of the decorations were most likely purchased at Woolworth's Five and Ten or one of the other variety stores in Bloomfield Centre. The materials from which they were made were the same as those used during the 19th century, including crepe paper, cardboard, cotton wool, pine cones, and, of course, real evergreens. The fragrance of these were a part of the Holidays but how many Christmases were turned into fatal disasters by the careless use of these highly combustible materials placed near open fires and lighted candles? The risk was hardly worth it, but few fireproof alternatives were available*.

Of course there was a real tree, set up in the nearby sun porch next to the front door. The Eichorns used the old-fashioned outdoor lights (now coming back into style) that had larger bulbs and gave a much brighter light. One of the most memorable sights of that era was that brightly lighted tree, the largest in the neighborhood, shining out into a wintry world through the many-paned windows of the sun porch.

As fashions in home decorating changed over the years, much happened to this room. The wallpapered panels were painted over, a large mirror took up the entire space over the mantel, and the bricks of the fireplace were painted white, thus banishing open fires forever. The light brackets were removed, the flowered chintz draperies replaced with plain draw curtains for privacy, the iron fire-dogs relegated to the basement, the etagiere banished to the attic, and the oriental rug replaced with a plain wall-to-wall. All of the above were certainly considered "improvements", yet a feeling of coziness seemed to have been lost. The updated room no longer reflected the era expressed by the exterior of this charming bungalow, the fate of which now hangs in the balance. Will it stand for another 80 years? Only time and the developers can answer.

*As late as the early 1990's, a large home on Ridgewood Avenue was destroyed by the combustion of garlands of real evergreens draped over a lighted dining room fixture.



With sincere wishes
for your happiness
at Christmas and
throughout the New Year



(Photo by Dorothy Johnson, July, 1963.)

ALLISON DODD BARN

The demolition of the Allison Dodd home in May of 1994 received front-page news from Independent Press editor, the late Russell Roemmele. It was illustrated with pictures of the half-wrecked house, along with his narration of the destruction of this beautiful home. He also mentioned that "...the two 'outer buildings' were already down", possibly referring to the two shown above.

Sometime later, around 2002, the backyards of several of the new two family houses that had replaced this stately mansion began to sink. As the holes got deeper and wider, residents naturally became alarmed and an inquiry was made into the problem. It disclosed the unsuspected existence of an underground passageway from the basement of the Dodd house to the barn/stable/garage, probably built for access to it in inclement weather.

Lest any amateur historians leap to a conclusion, it was *not* part of the "underground railway" that is commonly supposed to have been built for the safe passage of escaping slaves. Recent re-



(Photo by Dorothy Johnson, July, 1963.)

EDMUND DAVEY BARN

search has proved that these tunnels, where they are found, were built for other purposes. This one may have dated from 1895; 30 years after its use would have been unnecessary.

From the *Bloomfield Citizen*, November 29, 1890

"The Gamewell Automatic Fire Alarm System went into operation on Thanksgiving Day. At 8:15 on the evening of the same day, the first practical test of the system was made when Mr. Robert Moss pulled Box 47, calling out the department to a serious fire on Belleville Avenue. Mr. R.H. Davey's barn was destroyed." [Which possibly dated from 1865, when the house was completed.] "...the firemen were unable to save any part of the building, but did good work in preventing the spread of the flames to the adjoining buildings."

Continued on page 4



Jennie rests for a few minutes on the dam that formed the millpond for the Davey Board Company. This was as far as she could walk before entering the property of the Davey Company, closed on Sunday. (Photo dated 1905)

Several photographs of this attractive young lady have been found among those of the Baldwin family. We know from published directories that Jennie worked as a Secretary to the Superintendent of Bloomfield Schools in the early 1900's and lived at 281 Franklin Street in 1910. By the time

Jennie Weller

of her death in 1934, she had moved to a new apartment building complex still standing at 5 Park Street.

During her lifetime, (1877-1934) Jennie saw many changes in the neighborhood, all of it taking place within 25 years. The high school in which she worked in 1905 was the red brick building at Broad Street and Belleville Avenue, now the School Administration building. Then in 1912 she moved across the street to the new High School, which had been built on the northern half of the Ira Dodd property on the west side of Broad. The site of the Colfax store on the northwest corner of the intersection of Broad Street and Belleville Avenue, became an apartment building in the mid-1920s. Another and larger gray brick apartment went up on a vacant lot on the northeast corner of the same intersection, at about the same time, an unfortunate product of the building boom of the post World-War-One era.

Jennie must have also remembered the old home of Thomas Decher, an 1870's mansard-roofed structure on the eastern half of the block on which stood the new apartment house in which she was living during her last years. Nothing else remained in that neighborhood from 1905 ex-

cept the "Old First" Presbyterian Church, a landmark since 1796, and the adjoining 1840 Lecture Room.

In this beautiful old photo, Jennie is resting from her walk along Davey's Lane from Belleville Avenue. A stroll along this unpaved country road between fields of wheat and under the large old trees of Davey's Woods was considered very pleasant and respectable recreation on warm Sunday afternoons as late as the 1930's. A view of these beautiful woods, some of which still remain, was painted by Charles Warren Eaton and originally hung in the Bloomfield Public Library.

Jennie never married. Her mother, Mary B. Weller (1845-1915) married a second time to Louis Cockefair, and she, Jennie, Louis, and a few other family members now share space in the same plot in Bloomfield Cemetery. Was Mary's initial a "B" for Baldwin? It seems likely that there was a connection, inasmuch as several other photographs of Jennie, some taken in the 1930's, were found among the Baldwin family photographs in the Historical Society Museum. But, as in so many other instances, documentary evidence is yet to be found.



General Joseph Bloomfield

THE NEW TOWN CRIER
THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF BLOOMFIELD
90 Broad Street
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

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NEW TOWN CRIER STAFF

Frederick Branch, Editor
Pat Post, Assistant Editor
John Gibson, Ad Hoc

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.

Patricia Copeck, Bloomfield, NJ
Robert Stewart, Bluffton, SC

How To Join The HSOB

The Society welcomes anyone who has an interest in local history and who want to know more about it. Moreover, anyone below the legal voting age who wants to contribute to this newsletter is more than welcome to submit a manuscript to this Newsletter. Our address is: Historical Society of Bloomfield Museum, c/o Bloomfield Public Library, 90 Broad St., Bloomfield 07003.

E-MAIL THE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF BLOOMFIELD AT:
BloomfHist@aol.com
OR CALL US AT: **973-743-8844**

Threads of History



Painting at Hatfield House of William Cecil, first Lord Burghley, probably by Hans Eworth. This illustration is from a book "The Cecils of Hatfield House".

I paused at page 18 in "Bloomfield Revisited" by Jean Kuras and Frederick Branch. The photo showed John Gibson shaking hands with Lord David Burghley of England. I had met Mr. Gibson several years ago during an oral history session. He was then in his mid-nineties. I remembered what he recalled about Lord Burghley—what a fine sportsman he was.

The occasion for the handshake between the men went back to the Penn Relays in 1927. That event was a 400-meter hurdle race. Both men, English and American, were the great hurdlers of their era. Gibson defeated Burghley, but the officials, bowing to royalty, wanted to disqualify Gibson because he went to Fordham at night. Burghley's reply:

"It doesn't matter when he is going to school. He won the race." John Gibson was so impressed by Burghley's sportsmanship that 79 years later he recounted it for us in the oral history session.

So the title Lord Burghley was freshly in mind when I came across it soon again in an historical biography of Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, an Elizabethan man who married Anne Cecil, daughter of William Cecil, the first Lord Burghley. William Cecil first served Henry VIII and then Elizabeth I, Henry's daughter, for 45 years, until he died in harness at 77. In February 1571 Elizabeth I in a ceremony at Westminster made William Cecil a baron with the Lord Burghley title for his services to her, as spymaster, treasurer, political advisor, and diplomat. He was constantly at her side. As a person he was prolix, socially awkward, and unatuned to fine wit. But Elizabeth liked this about him.

William Cecil, Lord Burghley, also possessed drive, erudition, ruthlessness, cunning, pedantry, and conventionality. He enjoyed the spoil of royal favor and was one of only two men in Elizabeth's 45-year reign elevated to the peerage without noble ancestry or blood relationship with Elizabeth.

Some scholars believe William Cecil was a model for Polonius in HAMLET. His son Robert inherited the Burghley title, which apparently survived four centuries to devolve upon Lord David Burghley, the hurdler on page 18.

I spoke to Audrey Moore, my authority on everything English. Yes, she was familiar with the Burghley title. As a teenager in wartime Britain, particularly London, she and other English school children were evacuated into the countryside, away from the bombing. She finished her schooling at the Stamford girl's school in Lincolnshire. Burghley House was approximately 7 miles from Stamford, where she was billeted. Closer to the school, she said, was a pub called "The Hurdler" in honor of Lord Burghley, who was an Olympic champion.

It's probably still there. The Burghleys have staying power, as does John Gibson, heading toward 102, hurdling the years.

By Mary Wilbert

Barn Fire (continued from page 3)

Although the fire of 1890 was most likely not caused by lightning, (see page 3) Mr. Davey seems to have been particularly concerned about fire from whatever cause. This photo by John Gibson of the front gable of 317 Belleville Avenue shows one of the only residential examples of this kind of fire protection in Bloomfield known to the Editor. The glass ball has no other function other than decorative. The duplicate on the now vanished barn probably did not survive the bulldozers.

