

# The Newark Pompton Turnpike



Submitted by Montclair History Center

We're delighted to share part of an article written by Jean Jaeger, Secretary of the Cedar Grove Historical Society, for that group's newsletter. Jean talks about the development of the Newark-Pompton Turnpike, a toll road that ran from Newark to Pompton Plains. Today, in Montclair we know this road as Bloomfield Avenue.

The article is of particular interest to the Montclair History Center because of its connections to Israel Crane. Crane was not only one of the founders of the Newark-Pompton Turnpike, he was also the owner of a beautiful 1796 Federal style mansion at 159 Glenridge Avenue, which is now one of the Montclair History Center's historic house museums. Crane's house was in the approximate location of today's Geyer Family Y. Moved in 1965, it is now located at 110 Orange Road and is interpreted from 1796-1965. For tour dates and times, visit [www.montclairhistory.org](http://www.montclairhistory.org).

When Crane laid out the toll road in the early 1800s, he made sure a small street ran from the turnpike to his house – which was located next to his store – making it easy for patrons to access his establishment. That street, formerly called Spring Street, is now Lackawanna Plaza.

The Newark Pompton Turnpike was a more direct and smoother road than the "Old Road" that meandered through Montclair – or Cranetown as it was known then. – along what is today Glenridge Avenue and Church Street.

Says Jaeger, "On February 24, 1806, a charter was given by the State of New Jersey to Israel Crane, president of the Newark and Bloomfield Turnpike Company, to build a private road in the name of the company.

The road started from North Broad Street (now Belleville Avenue) in Newark and ran northwesterly through Bloomfield and Cranetown. It then went over First Mountain, then through Cedar Grove to Pompton Plains. A branch of the road ran from the top of First Mountain through Caldwell ending in Pine Brook. The two branches diverged at the intersection of what are now Pompton Avenue (Route 23) and Bloomfield Avenue in Verona.

When constructed, large rocks were laid down covered by smaller stones and then a layer of dirt. The term "turnpike" comes from the pike (or big log) that was over the road and turned when a toll was paid.

The four tollgates on the road were located at the Newark-Bloomfield line, the crest of First Mountain, Pine Brook and Singac."

In 1954, the Schoolmen's Club and Newark Public Schools erected a plaque placed at the site of the Newark-Bloomfield toll. The plaque was attached to a boulder and listed the tolls, giving us a retrospective look at the traffic patterns of the 19th century along a road we take for granted.

Wagons drawn by one horse	6 cts
Each additional horse	6 cts
Sleigh or sled drawn by one horse	6 cts
Each additional horse	4 cts
Horse and rider	4 cts
Horse, cattle, mules in droves each	1 ct
Calves, sheep, swine	½ ct



## Keep to the Right as the Law Directs

"Sadly, the plaque has disappeared," say Jaeger.

The tolls also help us realize the value of a road like the Newark Pompton Turnpike, which connected the city to the farmlands in the west.

In the mid-1800s, Israel Crane, who had acquired sole ownership of the Turnpike, passed the operations over to his son Matthias. His son James took over the general store.

According to Jaeger, the Morris Canal, railroads, and more public streets, led to the demise the Newark-Pompton Turnpike as a toll road. "In 1870, the portion of the road that is now Bloomfield Avenue was sold to Essex County thereby making it the first county road in the state. In the early 1890s, the county purchased the Pompton Branch, part of which runs through Cedar Grove, for \$22,000 and officially changed its name to Pompton Avenue. After the purchase, the tollgates were removed and tolls were no longer collected."

Today, as you drive along Route 23 towards Willowbrook Mall or along Bloomfield Avenue in the heart of Montclair, you are travelling along what once was the Newark-Pompton Turnpike. When you're stuck at a traffic light, think about the people, horses, cattle, and mules who have come before us who might have been stopped along those same roads waiting to pay a toll.

*Cedar Grove Historical Society operates a 14-acre historic site, Morgan Farm and Museum, at 903 Pompton Avenue, Cedar Grove. Visitors are welcome to shop their farm stand or tour the museum on Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. from the last Saturday in May to the last Saturday in October.* ■



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