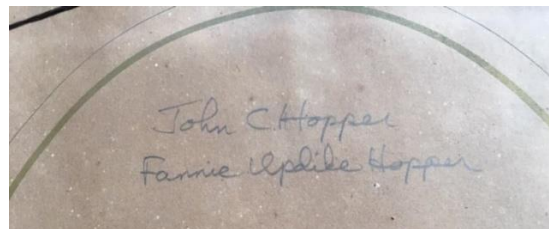


Blog 40 The Wedding Picture

By David Cochran

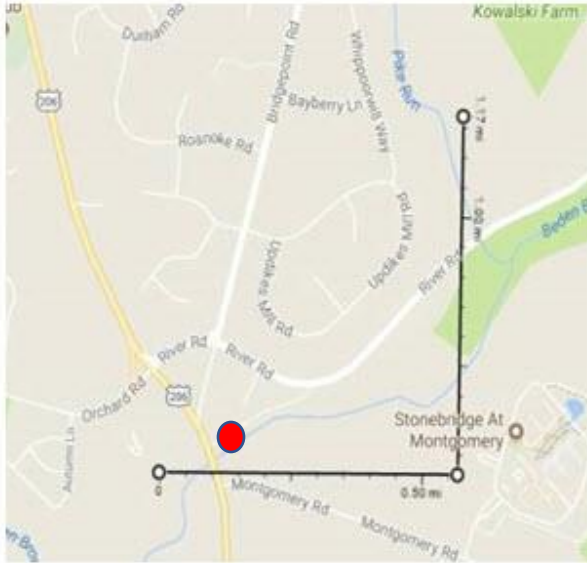


This picture of John and Fannie Updike Hopper is likely their wedding picture.

It's been said that there is a story behind every picture. In the case of John and Fannie Hopper's wedding picture, what you see is only half of what you get. The picture shown above hangs in Bill and Jane Van Zandt's hallway. It was found amid the collection of old Van Zandt photos that Bill had acquired when he cleaned his parents' attic years ago. Most of the collection has some tie to the Van Zandt family, best known for their agricultural acumen in Blawenburg and around the state. But this picture didn't seem to have any connection to the Van Zandt family. Handwritten on the back of the picture were the names of the couple pictured—John C. Hopper and Fannie Updike Hopper. After a bit of genealogical research, Bill and Jane determined who the Hoppers were and what their connection to the Van Zandt family was.

The Hoppers

The connection begins with Fannie Updike, who was one of seven children of Jeremiah Williamson and Mary Ann Titus Updike. She and her family lived in the Bridgepoint section of Montgomery Township near her father's mill. This property is on what today is known as Van Horne Road (Route 206) and Bridgepoint Road.



The Updike Mill location shown on modern and 1851 maps

In 1849, the same year Fannie was born, Jeremiah bought the mill along Bedens Brook from the Covenhoven (later called Conover) family, and it was known locally as the Covenhoven-Updike Mill. Jeremiah was a stalwart member of Blawenburg Church. Civic minded, he was on the Montgomery Township Council and was a Somerset County Freeholder.



The Updike house was built in 1780.

In the late 1860s, Fannie met John C. Hopper, a carpenter by trade. They fell in love and married on May 31, 1868. Sadly, Fannie passed away one year later, just days before her 20th birthday and the anniversary of her first year of marriage.

Over time, their wedding picture fell into the hands of her sister, Margaretta Williamson Updike Van Zandt, who was married to the famous long-serving postmaster in Blawenburg, John Nevius Van Zandt. (See John's story including Margaretta's picture in Blog 18.) The picture then passed on to other family members and ended up in Albert and Nancy Van Zandt's attic. Ultimately, Bill and Jane became the caretakers of the picture.

There's More to the Story

Bill and Jane can't recall when or why they took the back off the Hoppers' wedding picture, but they were in for a surprise when they did.



The old picture frame for the Hopper's picture

Behind the Hoppers they found two oval pictures with jagged edges that looked like they had been cut out of a picture frame. They wondered who the man and woman in these pictures were and why their pictures had been hidden behind the Hoppers wedding picture.



The hidden pictures in the picture frame

Like the Hopper pictures, these pictures were also marked with the people's names. Thank goodness! We would be wondering forever who these people were if someone didn't have the foresight over 150 years ago to identify them.

The photos pictured above are of Rev. Theodore Bayard Romeyn and his wife, Amelia Letson Romeyn. These names sounded familiar to Jane, and she immediately associated the names with Blawenburg Reformed Church. She checked the church history book and discovered that Rev. Theodore Bayard Romeyn served as the third pastor of Blawenburg Reformed Church from 1849 to 1865. The church was built in 1830, and the first pastor was called in 1832.

Rev. Romeyn came from a prominent New York family, many of whom were ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church. He graduated from Rutgers University in 1846 and earned a Doctorate in Divinity at New Brunswick Seminary in 1849 when he was 22.

In 1849, Rev. Romeyn was called to serve the young Reformed Dutch Church in Blawenburg. His Bergen County biography describes his time there. "He was called to preach Christ at Blawenburgh, N. J., near Princeton, immediately after his graduation, where he labored with a united people who reverence his memory and treasure his ministrations among them."

His tenure at Blawenburg Church was significant. It was a time of increased religious fervor in the country known as the Second Great Awakening. It began after the American Revolution and continued in the mid-1800s. Its evangelical focus emphasized people's dependence on God. As a result of the Second Great Awakening, Protestant church membership grew throughout the

country. The increasingly divided country before the Civil War may also have fueled more interest in spiritual life.

Blawenburg Church saw a significant increase in membership during Romeyn's time with 143 new members joining the congregation. By 1860, so many people had joined the church that it needed to be enlarged by 14 feet in the area where the pulpit is today. This is also the time when philanthropist Paul Tulane gave the church a large bell that is still rung today.

Rev. Romeyn was highly regarded, and he was described in the Minutes of the Consistory of the Blawenburg Church as "a fearless, faithful, fervid, and often eloquent preacher."

The Romeyns

Amelia Letson, the daughter of wealthy industrialist Johnson Letson and his wife Eliza, was born in New Brunswick, NJ. She married Theodore Romeyn in June 1850, just a year after he became the pastor in Blawenburg.

The Romeyns had two children. James was named after his grandfather, Rev. James Romeyn. He attended school in Blawenburg until 1865, and then he attended the academy in Lawrenceville in preparation for college at Rutgers. He became an attorney, and later in his life he became the editor of the Hackensack Evening Record.

The Romeyns' daughter, Mary, lived for just six months.



L-R Top, Rev. Romeyn, Amelia Letson-Romeyn

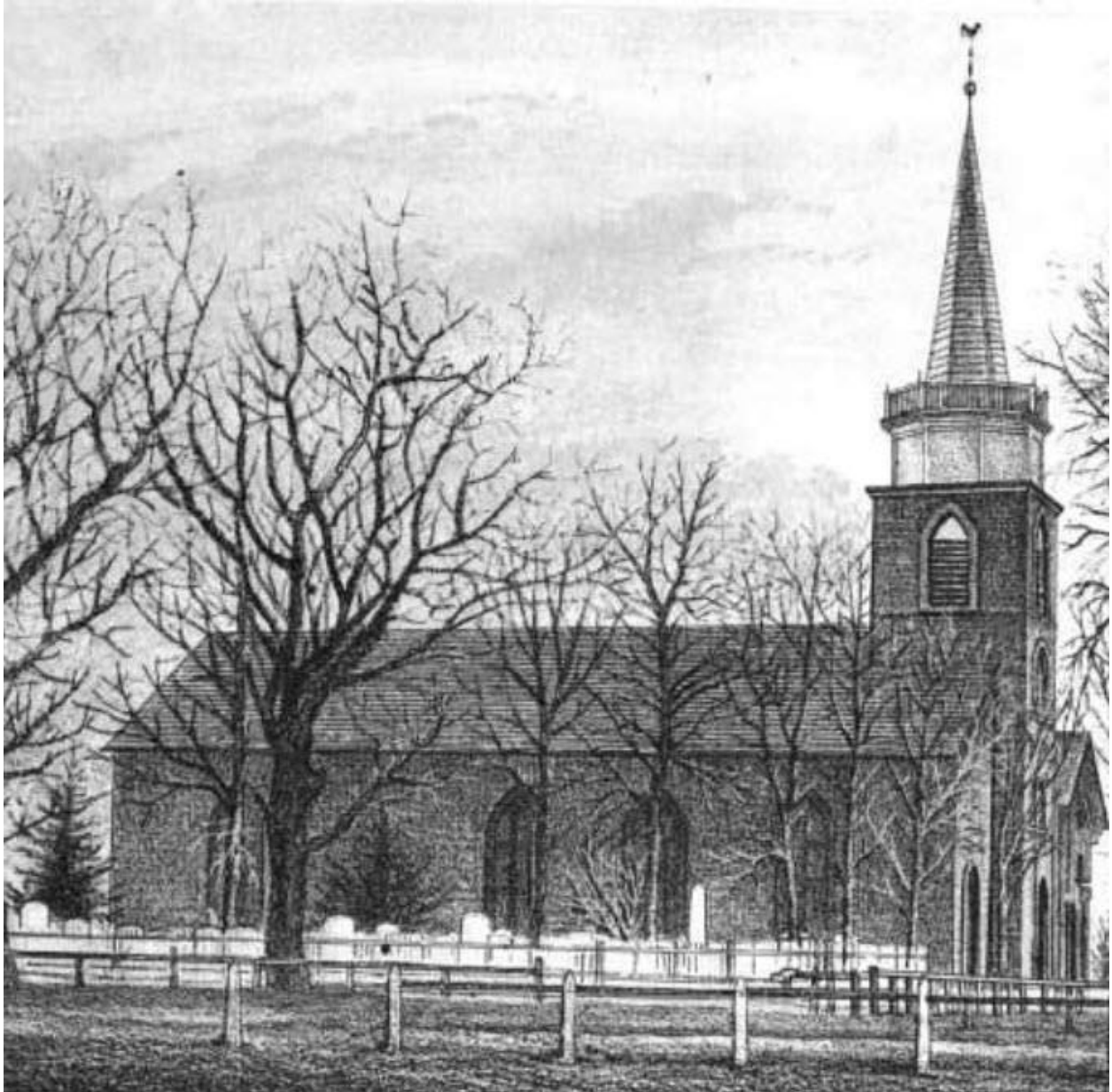
Bottom, James Romeyn, Mary Romeyn

This album page is from an Updike/Van Zandt album.

It likely passed to John Nevius and Margaretta Updike Van Zandt's descendants, Katherine and Fannie Van Zandt, and then to Albert and Nancy Van Zandt.

A Call to the Reformed Church at Hackensack

On May 11, 1865, Rev. Romeyn was called to the First Reformed Dutch Church in Hackensack, Bergen County, NJ, where he served until his sudden death on August 19, 1885.



The enlarged and remodeled First Reformed Church in Hackensack as it was drawn in 1869. This suggests that Rev. Romeyn also grew the congregation in Hackensack as he did in Blawenburg.

According to the Blawenburg Church history book,

“The members of the (Blawenburg) church were so saddened that they draped the pulpit in black the Sunday following his death. Consistory adopted a special set of four resolutions which were sent to the family. These expressed, among other things, Blawenburg’s profound and grateful appreciation of the gifts and graces of Rev. Romeyn as a Christian man and minister of Jesus Christ.”

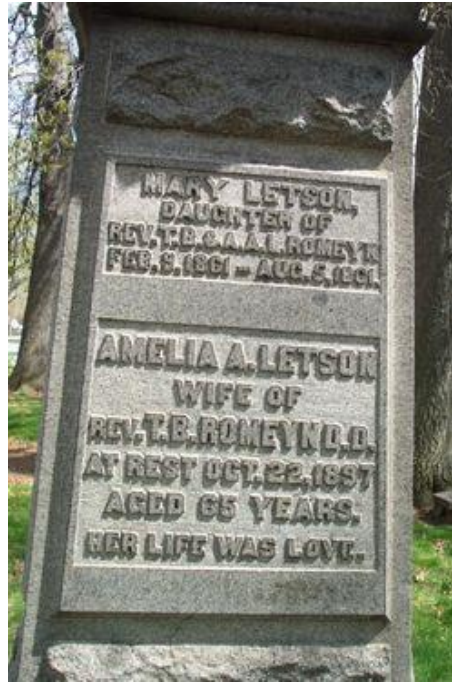
Hackensack church records show that Dr. Theodore B. Romeyn... “left as his monument, a strong united church.”



A monument was placed at Rev. Romeyn’s gravesite in the cemetery adjacent to the First Reformed Church in Hackensack. It reads:

Rev. Theodore B. Romeyn D.D.
Oct. 22, 1827,
Aug. 25, 1885
Pastor Ref'd Church Blawenburg
1849 to 1865
1st Ref'd Church Hackensack

1865 to 1885
Faithful Unto Death



The monument for Mary and Amelia, also in the First Reformed Church Cemetery at Hackensack, reads:

Mary Letson
Daughter of Rev. T. B. & A. A. I. Romeyn
Feb. 9, 1861 – Aug. 5, 1861

Amelia A. Letson
Wife of
Rev. T. B. Romeyn D.D.
Aged 65 Years
Her Life Was Love

James (May 15, 1853 – Oct. 7, 1933) is also buried in the First Reformed Church at Hackensack graveyard with his two wives.

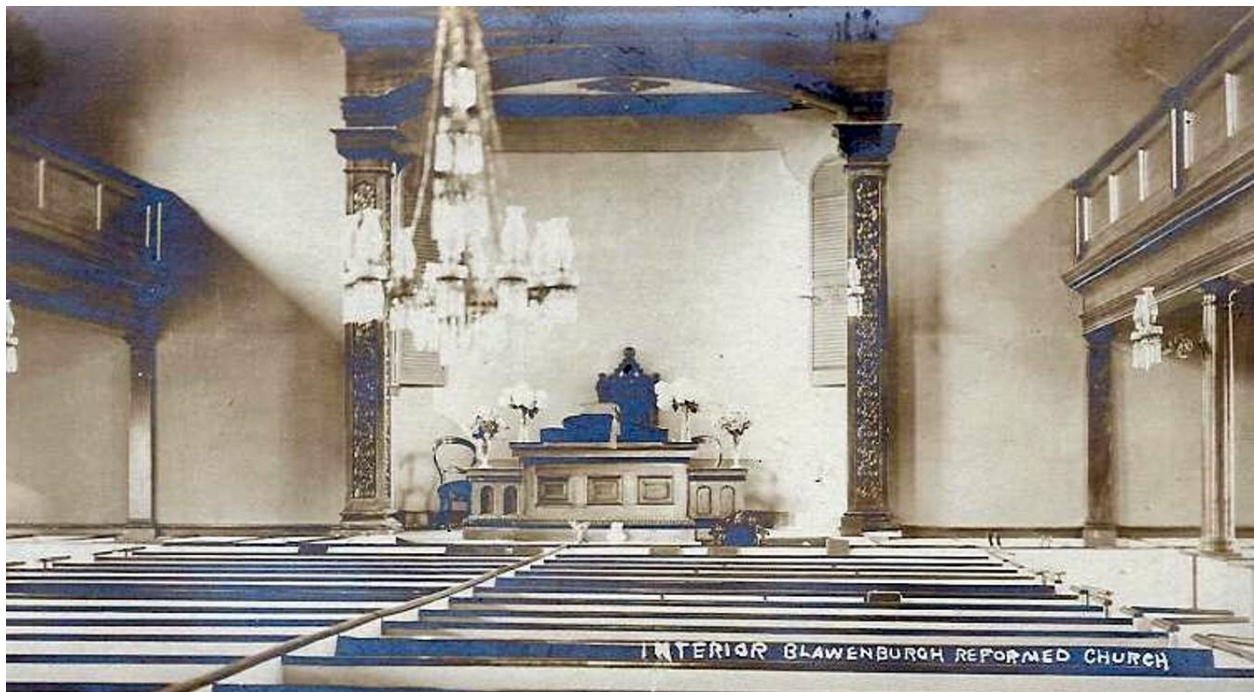
Fannie Updike was born the same year that Rev. Romeyn became pastor at Blawenburg, so he was her pastor most of her life. It is likely that he also married Fannie and John Hopper, although Rev. Romeyn had moved on to Hackensack when they married. The Hoppers probably put the Romeyns' picture behind their own as a keepsake.

Fannie was buried in Rocky Hill Cemetery near other members of the Updike family. There is no record that John Hopper (March 28, 1836 – April 22, 1902) ever remarried. He is believed to have moved to Hoboken after Fannie died to ply his trade as a carpenter. He died in Burlington, NJ, and is buried in the Hopper family plot in Cedar Lawn Cemetery in Patterson, NJ.

You never know where an old picture will lead you. In this case, it led to stories of a prominent local family as well as a revered pastor who led an early congregation in the small village of Blawenburg. Indeed, there is a story behind every picture, and sometimes there are more!

Blawenburg Facts

1. Dr. Romeyn lead the congregation of Blawenburg Church during its greatest period of growth.
2. The Blawenburg Church interior looked like the picture below after the addition was built in 1860. The organ pipes that are present today behind the pulpit had not been installed yet.



Interior of Blawenburg Church circa 1900

Sources

Cochran, David W. *Blawenburg Reformed Church, 1832-2007, 175 Years of Faith and Hope*, Blawenburg, Blawenburg Reformed Church, 2007.

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Picture Credits

All pictures of the Hoppers and Romeyns were shared by Bill and Jane Van Zandt.

First Reformed Church - Romeyn, Rev. Theodore B. *Historical Discourse Delivered on the Occasion of the Reopening and Dedication of the First Reformed (Dutch) Church at Hackensack, New Jersey. May 2, 1869.*

Interior of Blawenburg Church – D. Cochran, from an old postcard

Grave monuments for Theodore and Amelia Romeyn, Jeremiah Updike, Fannie Updike Hopper, and John Hopper – FindaGrave.com