

Blog 117 ~ Blawenburg Life Circa 1873

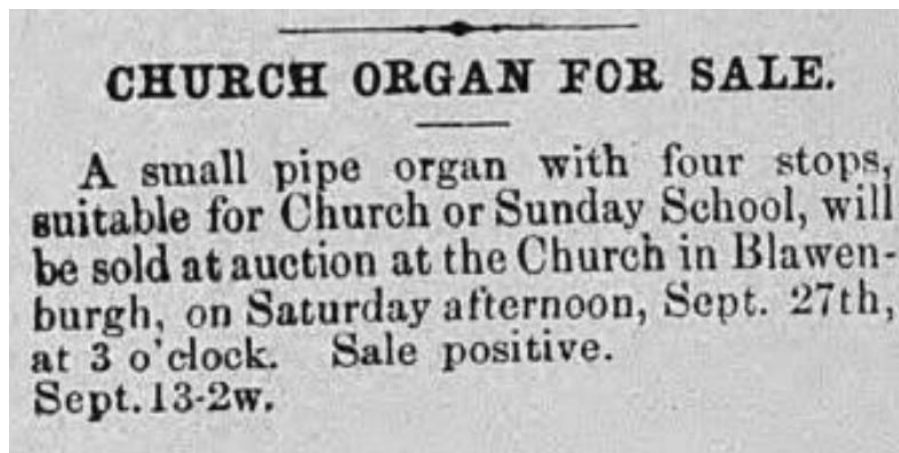
By David Cochran

Blog 116 was about the various organs of Blawenburg Church. Since that publication, we have uncovered more information that relates to the 1873 organ and life in Blawenburg around that time. We share that information in this blog. You may wish to re-read Blog 116 before reading this blog.

Before the purchase of the 1873 organ, the church had a small pump organ. We believe the pump organ served the congregation from the start of its ministry in 1832 until the new, much larger pump organ was installed in 1873.

Continuing Organ Life

You might wonder what the church did with the original organ. Thanks to Ken Chrusz, we now know part of the answer. The church put a classified ad in the Princeton Press and auctioned it off. The ad appears below.



In the 1800s, it was common to have pump organs in private homes. We don't know the results of this organ sale, but likely someone in the area continued to play it for several years after getting a "deal" at the church auction.

Harvest Home

We mentioned that the church held a variety of fundraisers to pay for the organ. The Harvest Home was one of them. The ad below was for an earlier Harvest Home, but it is typical of what happened at Harvest Homes. These annual events were as much about the community as they were about the church. Because farming was the primary occupation in Montgomery Township, everyone in the community came together with their neighbors to celebrate the harvest.

Harvest Homes were common in Europe, especially in the British Isles and the Netherlands. These immigrants brought the tradition to the Dutch communities of Central Jersey. Griggstown Reformed Church still holds an annual Harvest Home.

Harvest Home events typically were organized by churches, but they included non-church activities. In the same ad below for the 1860 Harvest Home in Blawenburg, the Common School held an exhibition during the event. The Common School was the school in Blawenburg just east of the church. This building is on the State and National Register of Historic Places and still serves as a school, Blawenburg Village Preschool.

SCHOOL EXHIBITION
AND
Harvest Home!

A COMMON SCHOOL EXHIBITION AND HAR-
vest Home Celebration, will be held at Blawen-
burgh, on the Church grounds, on

Wednesday, September 26th, 1860.

The Exhibition will commence at 10 1-2 o'clock,
A. M., and the exercises will consist of Rehearsals,
Declamations and Singing by the Children.

At 2 o'clock, P. M. the Rev. Daniel Cole, of East
Millstone, will deliver an address appropriate to the
occasion.

After the address, a substantial meal, furnished by
the ladies, will be served up.

Refreshments in all their variety, will be furnish-
ed throughout the day.

A String Band will enliven the occasion by playing
stirring Marches and National Airs.

The public are respectfully invited to attend.

The proceeds will be devoted to the benefit of the
Reformed Dutch Church at Blawenburgh.

Should the weather prove unfavorable, the exerci-
ses will be postponed until the next pleasant day.

September 19, 1860.

*This earlier Harvest Home at Blawenburg Church
involved students from the local school system.*

Beloved Pastor Voorhees

Rev. William Voorhees was the pastor of Blawenburg Church and was instrumental in getting the new organ for the church in his first year of service. Although he had a difficult start at Blawenburg, he was innovative and well loved by church members. (See *Fact 4 below.*) When he passed away, the church replaced its 60-year-old tin ceiling with a Victorian-style, oak tongue-and-groove ceiling in his memory. The picture below shows Rev. Voorhees and his daughter during his ministry. The picture reveals some of how people lived in Blawenburg over 150 years ago.



This picture shows the way the church looked sometime between 1873 and 1892, the time when Rev. Voorhees was pastor. Note the picket fence in front of the church. On the left and right of the church are the sheds used by church members to house their horses and wagons while attending church services. Rev. Voorhees and his daughter (It is very hard to see her on his left.) are standing on the right side of the church. Equally difficult to see behind the fence on the right side is a wooden platform, approximately two feet high. According to a description of the picture, it was used as a “stepping block

for ladies to alight from their surreys, buggies, and carryalls when coming to church.” There was one of these platforms on each side of the church. All the trees in this picture are gone, but back in the day, there were railings around the trees for members to tie up their horses.

Blawenburg Church was the focal point of community life in its early years. Nearly everyone was Dutch, and so they worshiped at the Reformed Dutch Church of Blawenburg. What happened at the church was important for the community. When they bought a new organ, it was a big event. The pastor was more than the church leader; he was a community leader, too. Viewing these two blogs about the organs and events surrounding them gives us a glimpse into the life of the Village of Blawenburg’s early residents.

FACTS

1. If you’re like me, you may wonder what a stop is. According to Google, a stop controls the airflow in a pump organ. By pulling the stop out, pressurized air moves to the pipes in its rank, the section of pipes it is linked to. This allows the organist to press keys that direct the air to specific pipes that make a specific sound. The old church pump organ had four stops. Larger organs have many more stops.
2. Harvest Home celebrations included eating, dancing, and playing games. They grew to be a time to give thanks for the abundance of the harvest. In modern times, they have included donating food to those in need through food banks and other charitable organizations.
3. At the Harvest Home in 1860, students from the Common School presented declamations. Students in early America spent a great deal of time memorizing facts and speeches. They would publicly display or declaim their knowledge by reciting the speeches they had memorized. This method of education came from ancient Rome. Today we believe that learning takes place when we engage with material rather than just repeating words written by others.
4. According to the notes of Frederic Skillman, when Rev. Voorhees arrived, it was shortly after the Civil War. Issues about the war were still being talked about in the community. Some called the Dutch were called “Dutch Traders”, accusing them of supporting slavery by bringing slaves to America.

Rev. Voorhees was known as a “copperhead,” a supporter of the Southern cause. When he arrived in Blawenburg, he brought a black woman and her child

with him. This caused quite a controversy in Blawenburg and got his ministry off to a shaky start. What happened to the woman or her child are not known. Rev. Voorhees overcame the controversy and led one of the most active and engaging ministries in Blawenburg.

SOURCES

Information

Rev. Voorhees and daughter—caption on original picture

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

Pictures

Church Organ for Sale—*Princeton Press*, September 8, 1873.

School Exhibition/Harvest Home—*Princeton Standard*, September 19, 1860

Rev. Voorhees and daughter—Blawenburg Church

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