



**JOHN GARRETT JR**  
15 HITCHCOCK PL  
MONTCLAIR NJ 07042-3102

**HISTORIC NAME:**

Washington Hose Company # 3  
210 Bloomfield Ave.  
Montclair

**BLOCK / LOT 3102 / 21**

**COMMON NAME:**

Crawford Crews, American Legion Post #251

**OWNER /ADDRESS:**

Crawford Crews American Legion Post #251 (Essex County)  
210 Bloomfield Ave., Montclair N.J. 07042

**DESCRIPTON:**

Construction Date: 1893

Source of data; Local Archives

Architect:

Builder:

Style:

Number of Stories: 2 + Basement

Foundation: Brick

Roof Chimneys: One way sloping roof w/parapet; stepped at sides; exterior chimney west wall.

**BASIS FOR HISTORIC DESIGNATION:**

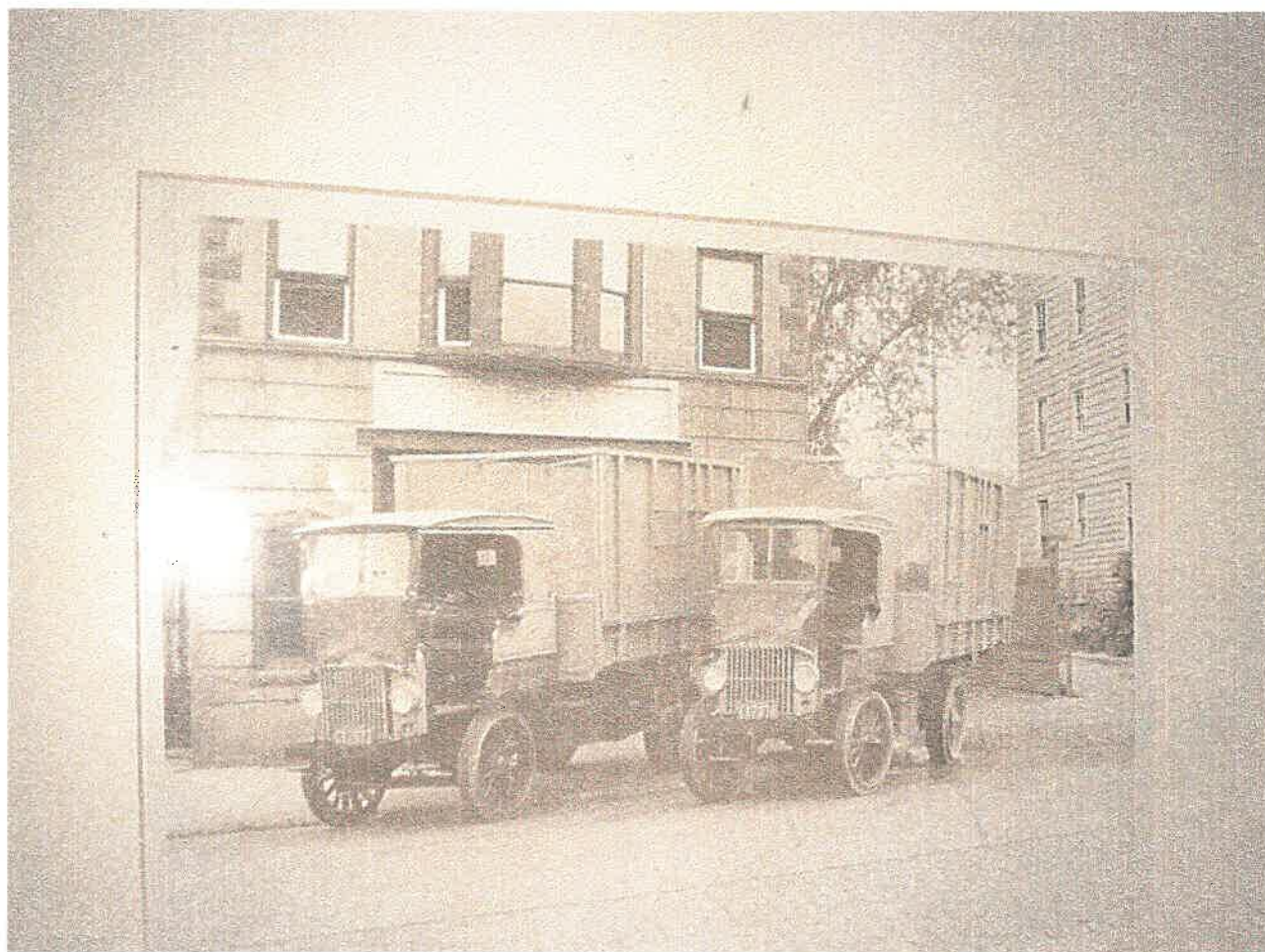
The subject building at 210 Bloomfield Avenue, formerly Washington Hose Company no. #3, and currently owned by Crawford Crews American Legion Post # 251 has been associated with significant events basic to the evolution of our Montclair community since the turn of the past century i.e., the development of the fire security system as the voters changed the form of government from a township to a town, where Washington Hose Company #3 played a significant role in the upgrading and organization of the fire security in the town.

The former home of the Washington Hose Company is still an imposing, stately structure, solid, sound and enduring, much like the many early structures in the central part of town, built by master architects and builders.

When the former Firehouse became the home of Crawford Crews American Legion Post # 251 in 1934, the community it was enthusiastically welcomed by the community as recognition of their special heroes, four Montclair youths who gave their lives in defense of America in WWI , earning the highest honors awarded combat heroism by the French government. Incidentally, these black American youths were forced to fight under the French flag, with French uniforms, and French commanders.

Post # 251 is regarded as somewhat of a shrine for these men, nicknamed "Hellfighters" by the enemy. Survivors of their unit, 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment returned home and obscurity in 1919.

We have taken the liberty of enclosing a document, which would seem to encompass the indicated criteria for designation of our Post as an Historic Site, page 9. (347-135) See enclosure titled "American Legion Post # 251".



THIS IS A PICTURE TAKEN IN FRONT OF  
210 BLOOMFIELD AVENUE APPARENTLY  
IN THE MID-TEENS, WITH TWO TOWN  
VEHICLES PARKED IN FRONT.

\* A matter of interest. \_\_\_\_\_

## AMERICAN LEGION POST # 251

Our present home at 210 Bloomfield Avenue in Montclair was initially the Washington Hose Company No. #3, organized August 9, 1887. In October the Company received the Silsby Two Wheeled Jumper. This Company was incorporated January 6, 1886. The House was erected and occupied May 1888.

Although Chartered in 1934, the current building at 210 Bloomfield Avenue was purchased 1944 by the Crawford Crews American Legion Post # 251. The Post was named after a Montclair Youth, Crawford Crews who was killed in battle in World War I. Crews, along with three other Montclair Youths, Austin Barnes, Alonzo Mills, and Benjamin Smith, were all killed in action within weeks of one another, approximately a month before the capitulation of the German army and the acceptance of an armistice in November 1918.

Crews was accepted as our Hero, because of the unusual circumstances under which he and his Montclair Comrades had to endure. These African American men were members of the famed 369th, 371st, and 372nd infantry regiments. They were not permitted to fight along side white American troops, but they clamored for their right to face death if need be, but with dignity. At the request of the French Military, they were adopted by the French army, where they fought as an integral part of the French 4th Army, wearing French uniforms and under the French flag. They remained in the trenches for a record 191 days without relief, but refused to give up a foot of ground, taking heavy casualties during a fierce enemy offensive on the approach to Paris, playing a vital role in saving the city. They died in lonely obscurity, unheralded by the U.S. Army.

The French government awarded Crawford Crews its highest Medals for individual gallantry, the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honor. The other Montclair Youths, Austin Barnes, Alonzo Mills, and Benjamin Smith were given the unit award of Croix De Guerre Avec Les Palms for their heroic performance. These Units were affectionately nicknamed The Hellfighters of Harlem. The French built monuments to these brave men, and they remain legends among French war veterans and citizens, to this day. These men are a driving spiritual force behind the # 251 Post, and thus its theme of Volunteerism, education, and community pride.



Post # 251 has received numerous citations on the County and State levels of the American Legion for increased membership. Several Municipal Resolutions of recognition for service to community in many intrinsic ways, i.e., dissemination of information designed to educate and also bolster pride and a sense of esteem in the scope of African American personal investment in building and protecting this nation. We have also received Congressional recognition for persistency in our Volunteerism theme, supported by action.

Post # 251 has been represented at several Congressional Hearings on the plight of the African American veteran in our history books and documentaries, with the support of the Congressional Black



Caucus, and President Clinton. Our research documents have been submitted at the Hearings. Many more exciting things are in the offing, and are only limited by the adequacy of our facilities for on-site Youth, and other needed Community programs. One critical problem is the long-time indecision of the municipality on the location of a proposed new firehouse, limiting our drive for desperately needed refurbishing of Post # 251.

#### **MISSION, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES:**

We, at Post # 251 are interested in Basics in dealing with our constituency, and we see true self-esteem as a critical component of desirable educational, and behavioral development. Much as discipline, it is externally imposed initially, and with positive consequences it becomes internalized, becoming part and parcel of the developing Person. We aim, through example, and education, to influence the kinds of images our young people have of their forebears, and the truth of the awesome sacrifices made, in the development of, and heroic deeds in the defense of this Nation. Our goal is to associate this with a sense of investment in this country, and a sense of Pride in the Legions of brave and resilient forebears. Teachers in the community, (parents, clergy, and groups ) must address these long suppressed facts in the school and the community with young people of all ages, in such a manner that they can identify with the qualities of these forebears and their accomplishments. This is a vital part of their heritage. The carry-over in many instances will influence academic areas, and general behavior, with the connotation of , " I really am somebody." Frequent subtle reinforcements may help the youngster to internalize some positive vibes. This is one of the missions of Post # 251.

The Crawford Crews membership is dedicated to providing opportunities to community youth, who in many instances are not in the proverbial " loop " which is often the key to awareness, access, and guidance necessary to taking advantage of the world of opportunities. Our goal is to reach and assist such Youth, to the extent of our resources.

As there is no rank in the American Legion, there is also no elitism in our dealings with our constituency.

The Women's Auxiliary of Post # 251 are engaged in support of the Post's mission in the community, through outreach and diversified programs.

Building self-esteem in African American Youth, by example and pointing up our stake in, and dues paid in the building and survival of this our Nation is inestimable, but often overlooked in our schools and community.

Research, and dissemination of vital information on participation of African Americans in the military, from the American Revolution to the present has a vital role in the teaching and emphasis of African American history.

Participation in Congressional Hearings on the suppression of information on contributions of African American veterans in military roles.

Scholarships to Boy's State residential programs for development of civic and governmental skills.

College Scholarship programs.

Services to Veterans in Veterans Hospitals and other facilities.

Family assistance in time of need.

**Children and Youth programs, i.e., Oratorical contests, with potential for scholarships.**

**Supervised Christmas, and Halloween programs.**

**Bringing educational programs into the schools.**

**Joining with community groups in activities to minimize negative behaviors, i.e., Mischief Night, and Halloween patrols in the Montclair community.**

**Setting example, by participating in significant observances, i.e., patriotic events, and memorial services on national holidays, etc.**

**Baskets for the needy during the holiday season.**

**Making Post facilities available for community-related activities.**

**Services to Senior Citizens.**

**Consultation and participation, on request, in a variety of human situations.**

**Community activism, involving Quality Of Life issues, coordinating with established appropriate community entities.**

**Joining in non-partisan political issues, awareness, and above all VOTING.**

The French people still hold our Heroes who fell in France in WW1 in high Regard. CRAWFORD CREWS, AUSTIN BARNES, ALONZO MILLS, AND BENJAMIN SMITH, were all from Montclair. Post #251 is much like a shrine. We take it very seriously, as we do all who gave their lives.



*369th Monument in Sechault*

**MONUMENT AT SECHAULT FRANCE DEDICATED  
TO THE BATTLE OF SIGNAL RIDGE AND THE  
LIBERATION OF SECHAULT IN 1918,  
MONUMENT DEDICATED SEPTEMBER 29th  
1997, 79 YEARS—AFTER THE LIBERATION**