

B'field Twp. Spans Two Eras

By SAVILLA SLOAN
Special Writer

Like any suburban area, Bloomfield Township has two historical phases—its settling as a rural community and its modern development as a suburban community.

Fortunately, both eras span the lives of the two men who have served the township government during its transition period, supervisor Homer Case and treasurer Arno Hulet. From their facts, figures and memories, the more modern history is easily available.

But also, both have family roots that extend back beyond Civil War days, so that the flavor of more ancient history has been transmitted to them. In addition, Hulet has a lively interest in the early settlement days of Oakland County, and I am indebted to him for early source material.

The three earliest settlers of Birmingham—John Hunter, John Hamilton and Elijah Willis—are, of course, the original township settlers for Birmingham was a part of the township until it became a city in 1933.

HOWEVER, ONLY a few years later, by 1823, other settlers had arrived and settled on land which still remains within the township boundaries.

They were attracted to lake areas as they came to farm, and the grassy lowlands around the lake would support livestock, while the wooded hilly lands would not.

Indeed, in the early settling of the township, the hilly land was believed to be untillable and it was not acquired.



ARNO HULET and HOMER CASE
Careers parallel twp. history.

Among the earliest lakeland settlers were Joseph Gilbert, who gave him name to Gilbert Lake. On Wing Lake there were three pioneers—Elijah Bull, Daniel Grinnell and Jacob Sly.

ALTHOUGH THE first school was erected in 1822 on land now in Birmingham, the second school went up in 1824 on Sly's acreage. It was the forerunner of Wing Lake School.

At this time Oakland County consisted of only two townships, Bloomfield which ran across the southern half of the county and Oakland in the northern part. However, by 1830, Southfield and West Bloomfield townships were carved from Bloomfield. Others subsequently followed.

By 1826, a number of pioneering families had arrived. The township had suffered its first murder when a crazed settler killed John Utter's wife and child in 1824.

It was time that government be established.

The first township meeting was held in 1827 at John Hamilton's home. The first two actions transacted by the township were to declare a bounty of \$5 for each wolf killed within its boundaries and to vote \$50 for the support of the poor. Obviously, there were more wolves than indigent people! The assessed valuation of Bloomfield Township, one-half of Oakland County, was at this time \$71,254.

ANOTHER SMALL community had been developing in the town-

ship called Bloomfield Centre. It started in 1819 when Judge Amasa Bagley opened a tavern. After 1830 the township meetings were held in the tavern for a number of years.

Bloomfield Centre is now the City of Bloomfield Hills which was incorporated in 1932 and separated from the township.

The early inhabitants of the township set its nature for the next 100 years, for they were principally farmers. What businesses were started served community needs such as grist and lumber mills and supply stores. Industry was not brought in, and to this day the township harbors none.

By 1872 the 36 square miles in the township had a population of 2,105 persons. In the next 40 years, the population only increased by some 700, reaching 2,833 by 1910.

THE POPULATION doubled between 1910 and 1920. However, the growth was principally in the Village of Birmingham, not in the outlying township areas.

In the 1920's the first hint of suburbia arose. Judson Bradway brought the first subdivision into the township proper with the development of the first section of Bloomfield Village. Several large estate-farms belonging to wealthy Detroiters dotted the landscape. Farms were purchased by real estate developers, some were platted for subdivisions and homes were started.

Then came the depression.

Lands that had been platted was returned to acreage, and the township remained a farming community struggling through the depression depths.

THE TOTAL population of the township at this point was 10,388 including the Villages of Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham. Then in 1932 Bloomfield Hills became a city and Birmingham followed suit the following year.

The township population was back to 1,352. With the loss of the cities' property, the assessed equalized valuation in the township dropped from \$30 million to \$8 million.

In settling township assets when the cities withdrew, the City of Birmingham received Springdale Park, the City of Bloomfield Hills received the municipal building on Long Lake just east of Woodward which is today its seat of government, and the township got the gravel pit on Opdyke and \$23,000 in cash.

With this money, and enough added to meet the \$30,000 cost, the township built its present hall in 1938. (An addition costing \$100,000 was added in 1961.)

THOUGH GROWTH was delayed by depression and the war years, by 1950 the township's 25 square miles (reduced from 36 when the cities were formed) had a valuation of \$14,451,000 and a population of 3,851.

But this is small to what the Fifities brought.

In the 10 years until 1960, population jumped to 22,530. Property valuation jumped more than 800 per cent to \$120 million.

The increase continues.

TODAY THERE are some 28,000 persons in the township, and assessed valuation is almost \$150,000,000. Suburbia is here.

IN B'FIELD HILLS

Post Office Moved Around

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD
Special Writer

Postal service in the Bloomfield Hills area was carried on for over a century before the Hills community had its own separate post office.

As early as 1819 mail was brought daily from Detroit.

The first post office in the village was known as the Bloomfield post office and was located at the corner of Lone Pine Road and Woodward Avenue.

IN THIS and its subsequent locations it served the surrounding area until Bloomfield Hills was incorporated as a village in January, 1927, and soon after that acquired its own first post office.

The unlikely location of the first post office was in the main dining room of the original Kingsley Inn, in the Barbour Building, with Eugene Walton as the first postmaster.

Sometime in 1929, the location was changed to a small area in the north end of the same building, and William Story, formerly the first village clerk, became the postmaster.

At the time Bloomfield's was a third class post office and the amount of equipment and number of employees was determined by the classification.

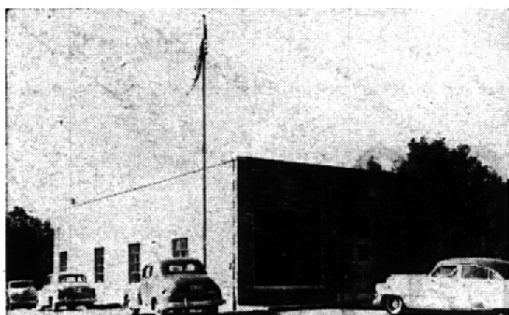
In 1943 the location was again changed, this time to the west end of the Barbour garage, which had been built on the corner of Long Lake and Woodward, in front of

the Barbour Building, and which also housed the fire department.

WHEN MacMANUS, John and Adams advertising agency moved to Bloomfield Hills in 1952, the post office was no longer an adequate size to handle the greatly increased volume of mail and a new building was built on Long Lake Road, just west of Woodward.

By 1958 there were six delivery routes and 15 employees, but once again the building became too small and the present post office on E. Long Lake Road was built.

Containing 8,054 square feet of space and employing 30 persons, the facility delivers mail on 13 routes, including parts of Bloomfield Township.



HILLS POST OFFICE OF THE '50's
Now located on E. Long Lake.

Franklin Minister Built Oldest Home

Bloomfield Township's oldest home stands on the crest of a hill on Wing Lake Road.

Built in 1833, by Deacon Elijah Bull, to shelter his bride, Melinda, and later his 10 children, it now is the home of the Junior William E. Chickering and their family, Charles, 12, Joan, 10, Betsy, 8, Susie, 6, and Carol, 3 months.

Deacon Bull was a founder of the first church in Franklin, and first lived in a log cabin on the shore of Wing Lake just west of the present home. He came from northern New York state, and settled on land that had been granted to Austin E. Wing in 1821.

THE SPACIOUS 12-room stone

Sticky Situation?

The two boats of the Wing Lake and Birmingham Fishing Club christened "Maid of the Mud" and "Ah Goo" were deposited in the club's boat house on Wing Lake with imposing ceremonies in 1879.

and frame home has been remodeled several times, but it still keeps its Early American charm.

The first level family room, with its huge fireplace and brick oven, was the kitchen. What once was the front door, now is the garden entrance.

Modern day visitors enter into a huge entrance hall on the second floor, stepping on a pine floor made of 6-inch planks. They are entering an area which was previously the back of the house, and the second floor and the third floor were bedrooms.

An old iron door knocker, shaped as an oak leaf with an acorn clapper, announces the arrival.

THIS HOME has had five owners in its 131-year-old history. The Bulls were followed by the William P. Durkees in 1874.

The Jefferson Thurburns bought the home in 1895. The John W. Gillettes moved there in 1926, and the Chickering moved there in 1961.

M. D.



TOWNSHIP'S OLDEST HOME BUILT BY MINISTER
Although remodeled, it maintains early charm.