

W. B'field Bustling In 1800's

By JANE B. MANN
Special Writer

In the year 1873, West Bloomfield, the "lake township" of Oakland County, was established by the State Legislature as a township; but in 1833 there were already a post office, a store, a tavern and several roads in the area.

The first purchase of land in what is now West Bloomfield was made in May, 1823, by James Harrington, who had come from Cayuga County, New York. That same year John Huff settled on a tract of land on the south side of Pine Lake and built the first home in the township.

NOT LONG AFTER the first settlers arrived, an attempt at full-scale colonization of the area was made by Edward Ellerby, a wealthy Englishman. Impressed by the residential potential of the lake area, Ellerby bought 13 80-acre tracts of land from the government and began arrangements for settlement of the area by groups of English

immigrants he planned to bring to America. After completing the necessary preparations here, Ellerby returned to England on a trip to recruit colonists.

He returned early in 1825 with his first detachment—a Mr. Rake, Michael Skinner (a cabinet-maker), and a cask of brandy.

STILL FILLED WITH enthusiasm for his project, Ellerby chose a spot east of Walnut Lake on which to build a "manor house" for his personal residence. When finally completed, the large log house so impressed Ellerby that he named it "Ellerby Castle."

Connected with the residence was a shop for woodworking. This shop was soon put to use for an unfortunate project: A coffin was constructed for the wife of Mr. Rake, who had not taken to pioneering life and died in October of 1825.

Ellerby made several more trips back to England to find colonists for West Bloomfield but was no more successful than he had been

the first time, and eventually he gave up his dream.

WEST BLOOMFIELD saw its first roads in the 1820's, although the necessity for them was not immediate. The settlers simply traveled cross-country.

The first road in the township was that running along the south side of Pine Lake. In 1828 the Pontiac to Adrian Road was built, and its route cut across the township past Orchard Lake and Walled Lake, leading eventually to Ann Arbor. Commerce Road was laid out between Cass Lake and Orchard Lake and along the south shore of Green Lake in 1831.

A post office was opened in 1831 to serve the area. Called the "Pine Lake Post Office," it was located at the house of John Ellenwood, its first and only postmaster.

WHEN THE TOWNSHIP was

established in 1833 a West Bloomfield Post Office began operations and continued in existence until 1862 when the postal area was merged with North Farmington. Another post office, named "Straits Lake," was established in 1836; the Orchard Lake Post Office was set up in 1872.

In the West Bloomfield area there was very little trade or business. A few mills operated, but these were limited in number because of the scarcity of streams to drive them.

One store served the area, though for only a short time. It was located on the north side of Pleasant Lake and was operated by William Henderson during the years 1833-1837.

The home of Nelson Rosevelt, west of Walnut Lake, became the first public house in the township and was used for township meetings.

DURING THE 1870's two hotels were built at Orchard Lake.

Local government began in West Bloomfield when the area became a township in 1833. Prior to that time, it had been a part of Bloomfield Township.

On April 7, 1834, the first annual meeting of the voters of the township was held at Nelson Rosevelt's home. Roswell Ingram served as moderator for the meeting, William McAlpine was clerk pro tem and the justices of the peace were John Ellenwood and Sidney Hinman.

At the meeting the township voters elected men to the offices of supervisor, township clerk, assessors, collector, directors of the poor, commissioners of highways, constables, school commissioners, inspectors and overseers of roads. Later in the 1830's the offices of justice of the peace also became elective.

Wing Lake School Steeped in History

By MARILYNN DICKERSON
Special Writer

Wing Lake children are proud of their school as all children are, but these young folks are in the unique position of attending a school that has stood on the same piece of land for over a hundred years.

Built in 1859, and known as the Little Stone School on Maple Road, it was a one-room building, built of stone native to the area.

It stands on a half-acre of ground donated by George Sly, whose grandfather, Charles, purchased the 160 acres across Maple Road in 1824. Elijah Bull donated land to the north for the grounds.

AS THE AREA developed, additions were made to the building and in 1959, the original schoolroom was refurbished and became the school library.

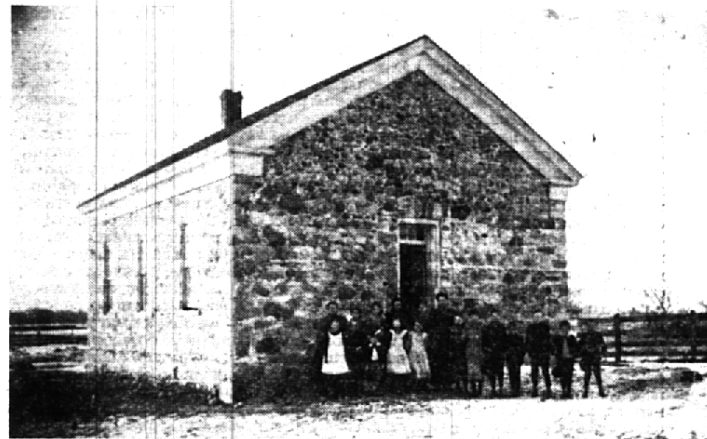
Now all the children from kindergarten through sixth grade spend some time each week in the charming room that could tell many tales of the past 105 years.

Wing Lake school children possess something else unique. They have a devoted principal, Mrs. Geneva Forslund, who came as a young girl in 1928 to teach in the small stone school.

As she was shown the building, she was given the key, told that she was in charge, and that she could begin a series of improvements.

SHE FIRST REQUESTED that the platform be removed from the front of the room so that her desk could be on a level with the children. In time, the slivery pine floor was covered by a smooth hard maple one and the double desks were replaced with singles enabling each child to have a desk of his own.

The school bell in the belfry sounded each day to announce to the community that school was about to begin. Children with knapsacks and lunch buckets were observed running in order to arrive at school before the bell stopped ringing so they wouldn't be counted tardy.



EARLY SCHOLARS AT THE ORIGINAL WING LAKE SCHOOL
Built in 1859, it was known as the Little Stone School on Maple Road.

Mrs. Forslund recalls a wood stove near her desk and an old pump outside, ink wells that tempted the boys, and a handbell to call the children from play. In her classroom were pupils attending first through eighth grades, plus a beginner's class that attended half a day. Fifty-two classes were taught each day.

THE BELFRY was the first

addition. The second change came in the early 1930's when the cloakroom, lavatories and fuel room were added. The stones gathered for this addition were once part of the Colby home which was destroyed by fire.

Sometime in the thirties, the attendance at school became so great that the seventh and eighth grades were transported to the Bloomfield Village School. Tuition was paid by the district.

Old Homes Landmarks Of Past

Robert and William Harmon purchased Quarton Road property from the government in the early 1800's. Their great grand-niece, Mrs. Leland T. Forman and her son, Gaylor, now live there at 4520 Quarton Road.

Elijah Willits was Mrs. Forman's great great uncle, and Harmon Street is named for her family. Her grandfather, John Harmon, settled first at Pine Lake, then in Southfield. The home in Southfield where her father was born 98 years ago is still standing on Lahsar Road near Ten Mile.

William Forman purchased the farm in the 1850's. His son, Samuel, was born in a cabin here in 1858. Leland T. Forman, Samuel's son, was born in this white farm home which is furnished with family heirlooms.

DESCENDANTS OF Josiah Barkley still live on part of the 150 acres he purchased from the government in 1825. Barkley was the grandfather of Mrs. Lloyd J. Duval of 25566 W. 14 Mile Road. Her father, Josiah Barkley, built his home where the Earl Long home is at the present time.

The Duvals and three of their children, Lloyd Jr., Grové, and Mrs. Lorin Duman, live with their families on land first cleared in the early 1800's.

Three generations of them have attended Wing Lake School. Barkley served on the school board many times.

Early Residents Remember When...

Walnut Lake was called Black Walnut Lake in the early days.

In 1824, Peter Richardson settled on the southwest side of Black Walnut Lake.

In May, 1825, Samuel Eastman came from Orleans County, New York to take up lands on the west side of the lake. Morgan L. Hunt, whose wife was a Miss Hunter (daughter of John Hunter, first settler of Birmingham), cleared land even further to the west.

The Whitmer homes on the south side of Walnut Lake are on land originally granted to Edward Ellerby. A. H. Whitmer came from Ohio in 1896, and married Annie Graves, who had been born and raised in a home on Inkster Road just north of Walnut Lake Road.

Three years later he settled on the land, where he still lives, and took up farming.

THERE IS a large red rock on Whitmer property dated 1899. Claude Whitmer says

his dad, at 93, has seen much change, and always with a bit of regret that there was so little land left in the area for farming. Whitmer's family were responsible for development of much of the property around Walnut Lake.

When questioned about the oldest homes in the area, Claude Whitmer mentioned the unoccupied wood shingle home on the corner of Eastman and Walnut Lake Road. His great-aunt lived there and he believes the home was built in the early 1870's.

WEST OF HIS home is the large white house that Joseph Sherer owns.

Whitmer recalls that Miss Lena Haakins, later Mrs. Henry Higby, handled the Walnut Lake Post Office when it was located in this home. This was before 1903.

He thinks the home may have been built about a century ago. Its barn, Shendoah, was built in the early 1900's by John R. Miller, and Claude

Whitmer helped fill the silo when he was young. The barn housed cows, but has been refurbished and turned into a home by the William Higgs.

Gibert Farm was built in 1859, and is looking for a new owner at the present time.

ON THE WEST side of Walnut Lake, on land that Samuel Eastman purchased, is a brand new tri-level that incorporated a bit of the old within its walls.

It is the home of Dr. and Mrs. John Thomson and their children, Jeff, Wendy and Tracey. A look at the shiny exterior would never divulge the fact that the Thomsons have added to and redone a home that had stood on the spot for many years.

But inside, the charm of the older parts is apparent. The old beams add character to the ceilings, and remind the children of the past—the new parts of the future to come.

Pickering Farm Still Covered With Apple Trees

Cooper Pickering and his wife, Elizabeth, came to Bloomfield from England some time in the 1850's. Their son George was born in 1856 on their Franklin Road farm in a home no longer standing. George married Lottie Forman and built the home that stands at 7141 Franklin Road 70 or 80 years ago. One hundred and sixty-nine acres belonged to Pickering's at one time, and Russell Pickering has about 72 acres left planted with apple trees. Mrs. Pickering was Helen Brodie of Square Lake. Their children still live in Bloomfield Township; George on Coldspring Road and Mrs. K. M. Keeley on Franklin Road.

Russell Pickering remembers lightning striking a building on his farm in 1922 and the building being immediately destroyed by fire.

This was the old Franklin Presbyterian Church building that had been built in 1848 and was not used except on the Pickering farm as a barn.