Cranbrook: World of Learning

By MARGARET RUSSELL, Special Writer

During the exciting years when George and Ellen Booth were developing Cranbrook, their beautiful country estate in Bloomfield Hills, there was never any doubt in their minds that the rolling acres would eventually be put to some public use. The answer to their soul-searching of how best to do this is today's six Cranbrook institutions which meet the needs and desires they hoped the community would and did embrace the debt to the state in which they had prospered.

When the Booths purchased Samuel Alexander's "hard- scrabble" farm in 1904, Birmingham's population was 1,282—Cranbrook's, the small Alexander family and a few hired hands. Today Cranbrook's population is 4,400 including full-time students, faculty and staff.

Once Cranbrook's objective was determined, the Founders dedicated the last two-thirds of their lives to the vast enterprise. Because the Founders were aware they might not live to see all of their undertakings accomplished, the Foundation was formed to assure the completion of projects already begun and the harmonious development of those still in the embryo stage. Actually Mr. and Mrs. Booth each lived to be 84, and did see their completion.

Cranbrook's community spirit sprang into being in 1904 when Henry Wood Booth, George's father, conducted Sunday school in a tent on a hilltop just north of Cranbrook Church.

In 1905 construction of "The Meeting House," the present site of the School, was completed. It housed Christ Church Cranbrook for mission days and during construction of the present house of worship. Christ Church Cranbrook was the "cradle of the institution."

Actually Brookside was born in 1922 and by 1929 extensive additions had to be made to "The Meeting House," followed in 1930 by substantial reconstruction and further additions. Here the nucleus was added in 1939. Today the school serving the Birmingham-Bloomfield Hills area, enrolls 250 children, all day students, in junior and senior kinder gardens and the first six grades.

Christ Church Cranbrook (Protestant Episcopal) came into being in 1915 but not until Sept. 29, 1917, when the edifice was consecrated, did it get its Meeting House. To the original church a porch was added, and in 1939, a large wing. The church is noted for its fine carillon and its ecclesiastical art, including recent paintings, with the building beginning with the 12th.

"The reason for Cranbrook School was first then because there seemed to be a need for a small boy's school and then we also needed a meeting house for the benefit of the community. We were required for the church and a child school might solve that problem also," George Booth wrote in his reminiscences on the school's founding.

However, the school developed in an unscheduled way. It was attached to the church, before construction of its imposing building was further enlarged. A gymnasium was added in 1920. Today the college prep school has a student body of 200 resident and 180 day students and 15,000 alumni.

Cranbrook Academy of Science was established in 1927 to promote instruction and research in the sciences. It has a membership but not a student body.

"ITS MUSEUM exhibits are re- moved for their excellence and interest and attract over 100,000 visitors annually. Its publication, study groups, black-and-white observation meetings, lectures, thesai, the Cranbrook Fair, like the Wengr gym at Kingswood were possible because of the need and encouraged outside grants, was dedicated.

Cranbrook's dedication to the arts is in the buildings themselves. The homes bear the names of men who made significant contributions to the history of Cranbrook, no institution, no building has been named for either of the donors. This was their wish.

THE BENEDICT FARM

A Hills' Heritage

BY JANE D. MANN
Special Writer

A brick-and-frame farmhouse built in 1815 by one of the original settlers of this area still stands on N. Woodward Avenue, just north of Lone Pine Road, in Bloomfield Hills. Known for many years as the "Benedict Farm," the structure is the oldest house in Bloomfield Hills and is believed to be also the oldest in Oakland County.

The house was built by Elijah S. Fish, who along with Amos Bagley and William Morris was among the first settlers of Bloomfield Hills. The 90-acre plot on which the farmhouse is located was purchased from the U.S. Government by Fish for $2 an acre under the "Two Dollar Act" in 1817.

His property included land on both sides of what is now Wood-ward Avenue, although at that time there was no road, but merely the old "Indian Trail."

The wooden part of the structure was originally built just west of its present site. The original east side of Woodward, then later the west, was a belt of wood, and the brick part of the building faced Woodward, added. Inside the house wide oak plank floors the flooring and the walls of the brick addition are six inches thick.

The house and its adjoining barn became the meeting place in 1834 for a group which organized a Presbyterian Church in Bloomfield; Fish was appointed an elder and deacon and was one of the prime movers in founding the church in the area.

The fish homestead was sold by Deacon Fish in 1837 to Eri Benedict, and the house has remained in the Benedict family's ownership ever since. It has been in the family for more than a century. Eri Benedict's father, John, who sailed to America with his brother William Morris, built the house in 1815. It was occupied by his son John, who in turn left it to his wife and three children.

Currently the Benedict Farm is cared for by Thore Rousseau, a Swede by birth, who lives in the farmhouse and oversees the property. Miss Benedict counts among her souvenirs of the Farm's history an arrow which was found when the land near the house was plowed — according to her story, Chief Pontiac made his last stand just east of the present farmhouse location.

Miss Benedict owns the property of the Benedict Farm and has been the largest individual owner of cranberry property in the State of Michigan for over 30 years. She has been active in the cranberry industry and is a member of the Cranberry Growers Association of Michigan.