

Bloomfield Blossoms



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Bloomfield Blossoms

Glimpses Into the History of Bloomfield Township
and Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

by Kay Smith



*With affection and respect,
this first book of history
of Bloomfield Township
is dedicated to*

HOMER CASE
Chief Administrative Officer

Born on Wing Lake Road, one half mile north of 14 Mile Road, in one of the few remaining authentic farmhouses, Homer and his family are today the only direct descendents of two pioneer families still living in Bloomfield. His ancestor Lemman Case bought land in 1822 and his other ancestor Wilkes Durkee in 1823. Jesse Case and Viola Durkee Case were Homer's grandparents.

Homer has been supervisor for the past 13 years and was treasurer for the six years previous to that.

He's dedicated to the principles of good and proper management of the Township and the welfare of its citizens.

DELORIS V. LITTLE
Township Clerk

While Deloris wasn't born in Bloomfield, she's adopted it as no one else has. In addition to having been Township Clerk for 20 years she serves on the Board of Trustees and Planning Commission.

Seeing to it that residents are well taken care of and their interests protected is Deloris' specialty, a double duty as night meetings follow full workdays.

She sums up her efforts to keep Bloomfield the residential community its people have overwhelmingly demonstrated they want: "You simply learn to say no to all those whose private interests are not in the public interest."

It's largely through the efforts of these two dedicated people that the beauty of Bloomfield as you will see it in the following pages has been carefully preserved for the enjoyment of all who call it home.





**BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP
BOARD OF TRUSTEES:**

Homer Case, Supervisor
Deloris V. Little, Clerk
Fred Korzon, Treasurer

Trustees:

Carter A. Chamberlain
Charles S. Low
Jerry Tobias
Robert A. Reid

FOREWORD

When the Bloomfield Township Board of Trustees appointed the Bicentennial Commission in October of 1974, they noted that no history of the Township had ever been published, nor archives assembled, although its population was nearing 50,000. The board therefore instructed the newly-formed commission to place top priority on the research and publication of a Township history, a Bicentennial project to be completed by July 4, 1976.

The work commenced immediately. The 150-year-old original records were removed from the safe as a starting point, and work on an oral history was begun with a group of our native-born residents, descendants of Founding or Centennial families, chatting informally. The tapes provided many delightful sidelights and comments used throughout the book. This same group gave us family histories, diaries and other documents for copying to supply our archives. In some cases, as many as forty pages of material back up just one page of the book. At the same time, county records were scrutinized and all area libraries combed for information.

In December of 1975, the Bloomfield Hills City Commission moved to join us in our publication, and the City of Bloomfield Hills Historical Committee carefully researched the Hills area and chose the subjects they wanted depicted.

Then, from across the barriers of time, shadowy hands plucked the pen from present-day historians, and wrote many pages from the viewpoint of an on-the-scene observer. The great French writer and statesman Alexis de Tocqueville wrote fully and beautifully of life in Bloomfield in 1831. Even before that, Captain Hervey C. Parke and Miss Fannie Fish gave us much material from the 1820s to light up the pages of history like the firelight of the pioneers' hearths.

It became evident early on that there was not enough time to prepare an exhaustive, footnoted history, so this informal one was decided upon. A "proper" history will be completed soon.

This little book would never have been published if it weren't for the cooperation and effort of more than fifty people. The thanks of the Board and the Commission go to each of them. They contributed to our Bicentennial celebration in what we hope the future will consider the most meaningful way possible—the preservation of our past.

Bloomfield Township, Michigan
July 4, 1976

Kay Smith

BLOOMFIELD IS ONE OF THE OLDEST TOWNSHIPS IN MICHIGAN

A certificate was received by the board of trustees this Bicentennial year noting that Bloomfield is one of the oldest remaining townships in the whole state of Michigan.

Originally it was part of a much larger piece of land known as Oakland, but on June 28, 1820, Territorial Governor Lewis Cass designated the southern part of Oakland as Bloomfield. It continued to embrace West Bloomfield, Royal Oak and Southfield Townships until April 12, 1827, when it received its new designation as a 36 square mile area by act of the legislative council.

On May 25, 1827, therefore, the first Township meeting was held at the house of John Hamilton on the Saginaw Trail, a board of inspectors and clerk of the day were named, and the first Township officers were elected. They were Lemuel Castle, Supervisor, Ezra S. Parke, clerk, John Todd, Joseph Park and Abraham Crawford, assessors. Other residents were named commissioners of highways, poor masters, tax collector and constables. Fifteen road overseers, nine fence-viewers and three pound-masters were elected, and a bounty of \$5.00 was offered for each wolf killed within the Township. Another \$50 was raised for the poor.

This was the beginning of a long line of public servants who in the early days included almost every resident of the Township. At first, there were not enough people here to appoint one road overseer to each section, so as new families settled, the first job a man held in public life was that of road overseer. It can be seen that almost every original family contributed time to local government.





BLOOMFIELD REDISCOVERED

The census of 1830 showed about 30 families living within the Township's 36 square miles. In 1874, another census indicated a population of 1,912. In 1940, after Bloomfield Hills had incorporated as a separate city in 1932 and Birmingham in 1933, the resultant 25 square miles left in the Township boasted only 1,771 residents. Ten years later, in 1950, the population had doubled to 3,851. Six people ran the government, all of it.

Then came the population explosion! Between 1950 and this Bicentennial Year of 1976, the population has increased to 48,425, twelve times its half century level. Today it takes more than 200 employees to run government operations.

The major story of Bloomfield therefore is not in the shadowy past when the pioneers discovered its gentle hills and fair lakes, but in the rediscovery by bright young families of what it has to offer as a beautiful place to live.

The natural setting provides a backdrop for its homes and its residents' activities, but only careful planning and a watchful eye have allowed Bloomfield to absorb this influx of new residents without destroying the way of life which attracted them in the first place.

Step inside our boundaries and take a look at Beautiful Bloomfield.



THE RISING, THE IMPORTANT, THE FAMOUS

Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham run an entire gamut in terms of one-family residences. Pleasant little houses in quiet neighborhoods are very much in demand. Larger homes in thoughtfully developed subdivisions ring the boundaries, and in the center of the Township, in a long band stretching from Adams Road on the east to Inkster on the west live two groups of people whose homes and style of living are as important to them as are their achievements.

One segment is the upward moving young executive whose progress up the "stepping stones," referred to in a 1960's article in Fortune magazine, from one community and one type of house to another, better one, parallels his progress from responsibility to responsibility in his corporation.

The other is the group who've reached their goals and can afford not only the best land, the best architects and superb construction, but those elusive commodities the very great and the very rich cherish—privacy and anonymity.

Both sets of people set high standards for themselves, reflected in their homes.

Examples of the work of six world-famous architects and many good local ones are found in this center section. One of the six, Minoru Yamasaki, has recently built his own home in the Township.



TWO GOVERNORS, SENATORS, A CABINET MEMBER

In 1846, the Michigan State Legislature decided to look into a new location for the state capitol. Thomas McGraw, Bloomfield Township's representative, put forward Bloomfield Center as an excellent place to locate the capitol.

He was asked rather sarcastically to describe the place he so highly recommended, and all he could come up with was "It's three-fourths of a mile north of Morris' Mill."

While he was laughed down and his suggestion turned down, some atmosphere of potential political prominence must have been present in his proposal, because in the last fifty years Bloomfield has been the home of many people who have wielded great power in state, national and international affairs.

Former Governor Murray D. ("Pat") Van Wagoner, who served in 1941 and 1942, has lived in the Township for the last twenty years. Former Governor George Romney makes his home in Bloomfield Hills. He was president of American Motors Company in the 1954-62 period and served several times as Governor in the years from 1963 to 1969. In 1969 President Richard M. Nixon appointed him to the cabinet post of Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Among the names of Senators and Representatives from this area, two stand out—Senator Philip A. Hart and Senator James S. Couzens. While he was in office, Senator Couzens bought his estate Wabeek and used it as a summer residence until in 1924 work was begun on a mansion. Albert Kahn was the architect, and no effort was spared on the construction or the detail. Marble was imported from all over the world so that each fireplace is a different type, and for the intricate woodcarvings, three master cabinet makers were brought from Germany and Switzerland for three years to do the finish work.



POLITICAL ACTIVITY ON ALL LEVELS

Charles Erwin Wilson was called C. E. when he was serving as president of General Motors (1941-1953) and "Engine Charlie" when he was Secretary of Defense under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953-1957.

He was one of many corporation presidents and board chairmen whose homes are in Bloomfield who used their know-how for the good of our whole country by serving on boards and in government posts in Washington and elsewhere.

There is more to political life than being a cabinet member or running for president. Countless Bloomfield citizens have served on local government commissions, such as planning commissions and boards of appeal. Others have worked for election committees and carried on a tradition established early of contributing time and effort to the control of their destiny. The government of our area is of, for and by the people. And it shows.

*The former C. E. Wilson residence, "Meadowlake"
presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon W. Hayes*



GIANTS OF INDUSTRY CHOOSE BLOOMFIELD FOR THEIR HOMES

Up until about 1960, most of the rising and the rich chose the Grosse Pointes as places to live. In Bloomfield there were estates, but most board chairmen and presidents of the large corporations which have headquarters in Southeastern Michigan lived elsewhere.

Beginning late in the Fifties, Bloomfield began to attract the attention of the executives moving into Detroit in the great post-war automotive boom. By the early Sixties, all four presidents of the large automobile companies lived here—John Dykstra of Ford, John Gordon of General Motors, Lynn Townsend, of Chrysler and George Romney of American Motors.

In this present year of 1976, board chairmen and presidents of most of Detroit's large companies live here. They include Chairman Thomas A. Murphy and President Eliot M. Estes of General Motors; President Lee A. Iacocca, of Ford; Chairman John J. Riccardo and President Hugh Cafiero, of Chrysler; President Paul S. Mirabito, of Burroughs; President Edward J. Gibling, of Ex-Cell-O; President Gilbert F. Richards, of The Budd Company; and President Joseph D. Williams, of Parke-Davis.

An interesting point about Parke-Davis is that the pharmaceutical company was co-founded by Hervey Parke, son of Dr. Ezra Parke and nephew of Captain Hervey Parke of our founding families. His grandson, Dr. Hervey C. Parke, is with the company today.

To round out our list of captains of industry whose homes are here it's necessary to note that since the early Sixties, every board chairman and every president of General Motors has lived here. The distinguished list includes John Gordon, James M. Roche, Edward D. Cole and Richard Gerstenberg as well as the present executives Messrs. Murphy and Estes mentioned above.

Countless vice presidents and other executives also call Bloomfield home. Grosse Point, good-bye!



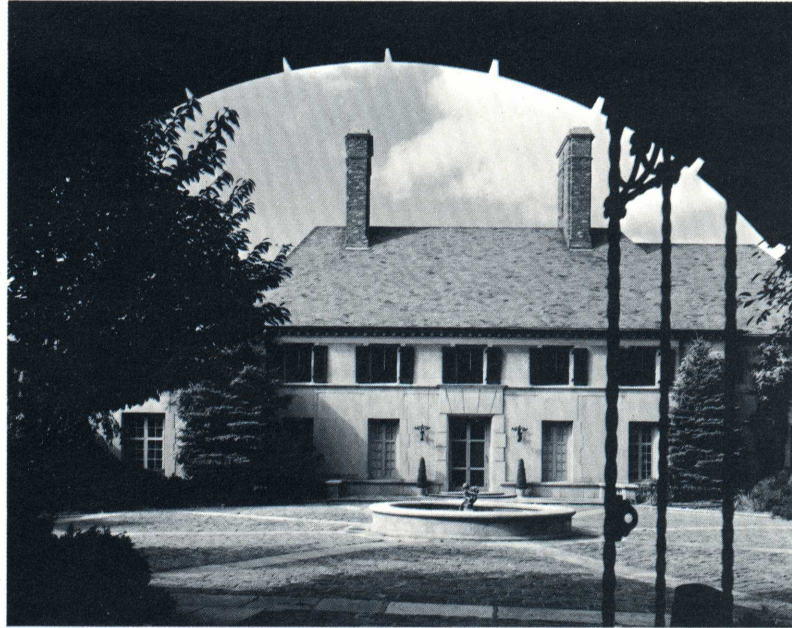
PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ATTRACTED TO BLOOMFIELD

In the 1820s, when the first settlers came to build new lives in the uncharted regions of our Township, almost every pioneer among the first ten to buy land was a professional man.

In the strip along the one roadway in existence at the time, the Saginaw Trail, these men settled: Dr. Ezra Parke and Dr. Ziba Swan, both physicians and educators; Judge Amasa Bagley, a first associate judge of the Territory who kept the position through and after Michigan became a state in 1837; Deacon Elijah Fish was a strong churchman and Bloomfield's first ecologist with his grove of maples and apple orchards; Captain Chesley Blake, who commanded the steamer "Michigan"; William Morris, a builder of enterprises such as our original gristmill, sawmill and brickworks; Captain Hervey Parke, a surveyor and teacher; Lemuel Castle, well-versed in the techniques of running the government and our first township supervisor, and many others.

The fact that each of these men pioneering along the one three-mile strip along the trail and building the same log house which sheltered every first family, should so blaze a trail of distinguished service through this area's history is scarcely to be believed, yet it's true.

In terms of residents who are professional people, only the numbers have changed since that decade 150 years ago. Today thousands of physicians, attorneys, architects, judges, engineers and businessmen gravitate to Bloomfield as a place to live, even though their work is done elsewhere.



*The Theodore O. Yntema house,
a traditional Wallace Frost*

*The house of Dr. Howard H. McNeill,
a contemporary Wallace Frost*



A RENOWNED PUBLISHER AND A DREAM CALLED CRANBROOK

No history of this area could be conceived without a discussion early on of Cranbrook, the outstanding contribution of the Booth family to all that the name Bloomfield Hills means around the world. People in many places know our area only through the pictures they've seen of Cranbrook.

Its six institutions are a symbol of private collections and ideas put in the public domain in four areas including art, science, education and the practice of religious tenets.

George and Ellen Booth purchased the 300 acres which is now Cranbrook in 1904, having come out for a picnic. With deep enthusiasm and care they laid out their plans for its development and even set up a foundation so their dream could become reality even if they didn't live to see it. It's heartening to know that both lived to be 84 and saw the whole development come to fruition with Christ Church, the Art Academy and Art Museum, the Science Institute and the three private schools, Brookside, Cranbrook and Kingswood.

More on the glories of Cranbrook later.

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THE EARLIEST BLOOMFIELD HOUSE STILL IN EXISTENCE

This is our Bicentennial year. It's acceptable this year to take a great interest in all our heritage, and in our old houses. Carry on a love affair with one if you want to.

This rosy brick house may well be the oldest brick building still standing in the State of Michigan. The brick houses and businesses of old Detroit are long gone, but this relic of our pioneer past is visible to anyone traveling on Woodward Avenue as it stands on the east side between Lone Pine and Long Lake Roads.

For years it's been called simply "The Benedict Farm," as the Benedict family owned and occupied it for almost a century. Previous to that, Deacon Elijah S. Fish was the pioneer settler of the land, having erected the log house which is now a portion of the back of the house in 1819. The brick part was built in 1836. Probably, since the bricks are small, they came from the brickworks William Morris started across the road.

The first white child born in Bloomfield was the Fishes' daughter, who lived to be eight years old. Deacon Fish held the first Presbyterian Church services on his land and worked indefatigably for the church all his life. He planted the first grove of maple trees in the Township. He was also active as an abolitionist.

The reminiscences of Fannie Fish, the Deacon's daughter, are not only charming, they light up portions of the old pages of our history as no other chronicles have done. Through Fannie's eyes we see the joys and terrors, the worries, sorrows, drudgeries and festivities of pioneer life. Later we'll read her description of life in the log house.



BEAUTY AND MYSTERY IN STILL WATERS

Sodon Lake between Long Lake and Lone Pine Roads near Franklin looks so peaceful and pleasant on an autumn day. The diving board suggests the swimming and boating which make it such a pleasant place to be in summer.

How sinister that it has a darker side, a deep secret vault where prehistoric mysteries are hidden. Words like dyothermal and meromictic apply to it. Sheltered from the wind, and just 5.7 acres in surface area, it is still 60 feet deep, and surface winds and variations of temperature don't affect that lower cavern where is stored the evidence of vegetation of each interim between glacial periods. The water at the lower level does not mix with the upper water, making the lake a rare phenomenon.

It was this peculiar characteristic which prompted Dr. Curtis L. Newcombe, of Cranbrook Institute of Science, who tested the secrets of the little lake in the 1940s, to suggest before the American Association for the Advancement of Science that Sodon Lake be used as a depository for nuclear waste. The suggestion was not accepted.

Sodon is one of 32 lakes and ponds in the original Township area, most left as the glaciers retreated, some man-made or at least deepened to drain off water.



WORLD FAMOUS ARCHITECTS DESIGN BLOOMFIELD'S HOMES

Many architects renowned all over the world for their buildings and others nationally known are represented in the Bloomfield area. In other places they have designed airports, government buildings, hospitals, museums, industrial buildings and art centers. In Bloomfield the same master architects have drawn plans for houses, homes for their owners to enjoy and for other residents to see and admire.

The trend toward excellence was begun by Albert Kahn, who was the architect for several of the early mansions. The Couzens house, "Wabeek," pictured on page 13 is an example of his work. In the Twenties and Thirties, Eliel Saarinen conceived and executed his plans for the Cranbrook complex. Many of his buildings are illustrated on page 135.

Frank Lloyd Wright was the architect in the Forties for both the Melvin Maxwell Smith house on page 29 and the Gregor Affleck house pictured on pages 140 and 160.

Three greatly admired contemporary architects have built here since the Fifties. Minoru Yamasaki has several examples of his work in the area, the latest of which, his own home in the Township, is pictured on page 11. Alden Dow, a Michigan architect with an international reputation, designed the Lynn Townsend house on page 17 and Edward Durrell Stone did the original Matheson house which is on page 141.

Michigan architect Wallace Frost has many many houses in our area to his credit. An early Frost house is the Yntema French Provincial house on page 18 and a later Frost, in his contemporary period, is that of Dr. Howard H. McNeill on page 19.

Eero Saarinen, when he lived in Bloomfield, occupied the historic century-old Vaughan house on Vaughan Road. Beside it he built the only house he designed for the Bloomfield area, a small one for his mother. Both houses are pictured here.



TWO FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT HOUSES

Frank Lloyd Wright designed two houses in Bloomfield. The Melvyn Maxwell Smith house is in the Township and the Gregor Affleck house in the Hills.

"An Usonic House," Wright called the Smith house, pictured here. "Usonia" was the name English novelist Samuel Butler gave to America when he thought it might represent an Utopian ideal place.

"This Usonian house is a companion to the horizon" Smith says of his home. 'loving the ground with the new sense of space, light and freedom to which our U.S.A. is entitled."

Wright's own home, "Taliesin," was fashioned as one in harmony with nature. Both prospective owners had seen pictures of "Taliesin" and each was determined to have a Wright house. In each instance the men approached Wright and said they were not interested in basements or attics and wanted a certain type of living experience. The primary building materials in both houses are fired brick and cypress wood from the tidewaters of Florida. Both utilize skylights, both have heated floors; neither uses plaster, paint or wallpaper.

The Smith house was designed in 1946 and built in 1949-50, the Affleck house was built in 1941. Wright visited both houses several times. Just before his death in 1959 at age 90, he came to the Smith house and told Mrs. Smith, "My dear, your delights are just beginning."

The Affleck house is pictured on pages 140 and 160.



BLOOMFIELD'S CLIMATE, AND A BICENTENNIAL ICE STORM

The climate of our area, as the climate of all Michigan, can be summed up in one word—changeable. Few citizens reading this book will ever forget the ice storm of March, 1976, or the tornado which touched down just west of our border in our sister Township of West Bloomfield.

An experience all shared was the terror of standing by the window watching and hearing great trees crack under the weight of the ice and come crashing down in all directions.

In 1821 Captain Hervey Parke underwent a similar terror, although in that case it was the wind which created the same scene. "During the sub-division of town 9 north, range 6 east," he wrote, "we encountered the most terrible gale of wind I ever witnessed in the woods of Michigan. The trees cracked and fell in all directions close around us. It was the same night the 'Walk-in-the-Water' lay off Buffalo, deeply laden for Detroit. The captain, after discovering the opening seams of the steamer, and realizing the impending danger, very properly gave the order to slip the cable, releasing her, and she went on shore."

The "Walk-in-the-Water" was the first steamship to ply the waters of the Great Lakes, and some of our pioneer families were on her when she beached that stormy night of November 21, 1821, just three years after the 342-ton vessel was launched. Many sister ships carried passengers and cargo to Michigan, notably "The Superior" and "The Michigan."

The captain of "The Michigan," Chesley Blake, who had been among the crew of the "Walk-in-the-Water," later settled in Bloomfield, buying property next to Amasa Bagley on the Saginaw Trail on May 26, 1823. The great large man, over 6'3" and possessing a deep voice and commanding manner, was a familiar figure in early Bloomfield until his untimely death in the cholera epidemic of 1854.



SUPERVISOR HOMER CASE TALKS ABOUT HIS TOWNSHIP

"It's rather a pleasure to reminisce over the twenty years that I've worked for Bloomfield Township, and watched it grow from a rural farmland area to an urbanized community of more than 48,000 people.

"Twenty years ago land developers paid approximately \$1,000 per acre for land. Although the zoning laws in those days permitted one-half acre development per lot, land developers chose to plan two or three acre sites because the property was inexpensive. When they were required to pave roads, they reduced the size of lots to about one acre. When sewer and water were added, and the land began to cost ten thousand dollars per acre, they went to the smallest lots permitted under the ordinance—one half an acre.

"The early subdivisions—Wards Acres, Bloomfield Village, Westchester Village—underwent difficult times during the Depression, but the land didn't revert back to acreage. Starting in the Fifties, the old farms were subdivided one by one, until today, in 1976, there are only a few undeveloped areas left, and only one or two small farms still exist.



Homer Case Home

*Ralph Brackets 1976
George Balocating*

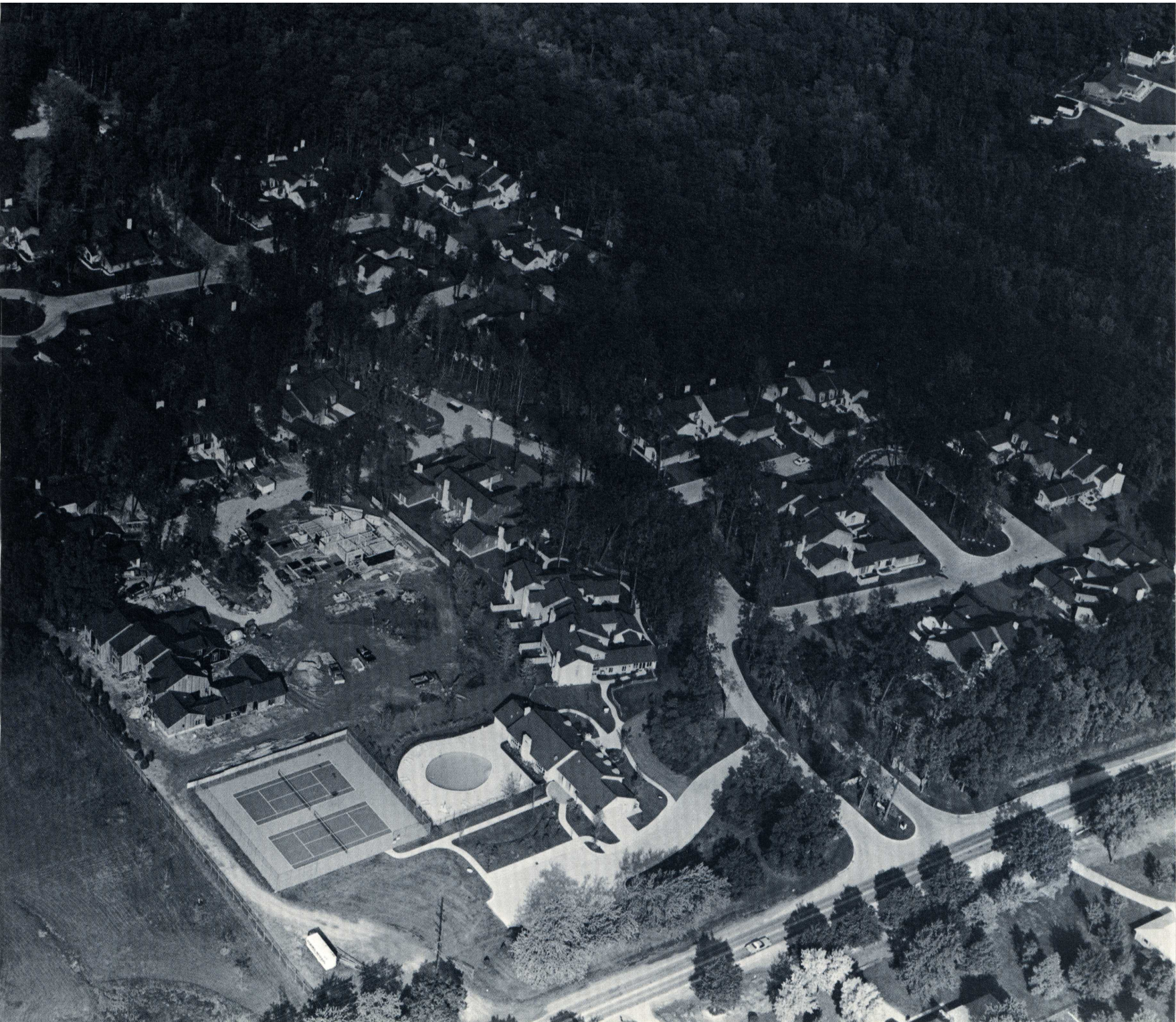
©

THE PHILOSOPHY WHICH HAS KEPT BLOOMFIELD RESIDENTIAL

“The people who moved to Bloomfield in the last 25 years wanted to move to a bedroom community. To avoid other locations where zoning might permit a smokestack on one side of them and some type of commercial business on the other, they were willing to come here and pay a higher tax rate to build and maintain new school systems. In the Township, 94% of the tax revenue comes from residential home owners, and only 6% from commercial and other types of zoning.

“I see no other future here except to continue as a residential community. As land values become greater and greater, we may increase our density, but I don't believe the citizens of this Township will ever be willing to allow other kinds of zoning to be introduced here. Most people come here with their life savings, ready to make the biggest investment they will ever make—building or buying their home. To add zoning other than residential would do nothing but depreciate their property.

“Holding the line has been difficult in a legal and financial sense, however. There have been years in the past when we've had to spend as much as \$40,000 in litigation costs. Requests are tapering off and we haven't had to spend those large amounts for several years now.”



DELORIS LITTLE— THE TOWNSHIP'S FIRST ACTING CLERK

Deloris V. Little first came to the Township offices in 1954. At that time the population was 3,200 and five people ran the government. "In those days all five of us did everything," Deloris recalls. "We worked as clerks, did building department jobs and even operated the police and fire radio."

Up to the time Deloris became clerk, the position had been a rubber stamp one, with the clerk coming in now and then to sign papers. In 1960, it became obvious that the expansion was going to continue and the Township needed a full-time acting clerk. Realizing this, Clerk Robert Dudley resigned so that Deloris could be appointed, and she's run in every election since that time.

Deloris was also immediately appointed to the planning commission, the first woman ever to serve on any board in the Township. She feels she was always accepted as an equal, and because she was involved in the day-by-day operation of the government, the board needed her information and opinions.

Deloris and her husband John were co-founders with nine other couples of the Bloomfield Hills Baptist Church pictured on page 149. Her strong faith in Christian principles is at the base of her attitude toward filling the needs of the residents of the Township. "If you can't help people, you have to wonder what it's all about" she says. "The people of this area have overwhelmingly indicated that the quality of their life here is their top priority. We've all worked to see that this quality is maintained, and our residents have an area primarily of homes, where they can enjoy life and bring up their children in the atmosphere they prefer. They want to live in Bloomfield and we want it their way too."



THIS AREA WAS ONCE A WILDERNESS

The carefully landscaped well-tended lawns and solidly built houses we see in Bloomfield today are far different from what this land was like as late as 1820. It's hard to believe that only a century and a half ago this area was a total wilderness, the complete antithesis of what it is now.

No need to use our imagination to try to envision what it was like. We have an on-the-scene description from a witness with a super-observant eye and a writing skill which has placed him among the great authors of the world. What brought this aristocrat from Paris to Bloomfield Township in 1831 and prompted him to describe every aspect of it in a treatise called "A Fortnight in the Wilderness"?

The chronicler was the great French statesman and writer, Alexis de Tocqueville, whose works, notably "Democracy in America" are on library shelves everywhere and whose theories are taught in political history courses around the world. A little background on him and the times is necessary to prepare us for a walk into the world he saw that July day of 1831.

Alexis Charles Henri Clerel de Tocqueville was born in Paris on July 29, 1805, a descendant on both sides of his family of the peers of France. At age 21 he was appointed a magistrate of the Tribunal at Versailles, a post he served well. He participated in the Revolution and in 1830, with his friend Gustave de Beaumont persuaded the Tribunal to send them to America to observe the penal system which was considered quite advanced for the time. The two companions reached New York on May 10, 1831, and after researching their subject on the East Coast, set out across Lake Erie to Detroit and expressed their determination to see something of a real wilderness. As we will see in the following account, they were thwarted at first, but eventually found their wilderness and their first glimpse of pioneer settlers in none other than Bloomfield Township.



TWO FRIENDS SET OUT TO FIND THE LAST REACHES OF CIVILIZATION

Tocqueville and Beaumont, with their great gift of curiosity, were determined to see America in its pristine condition. Having reached Detroit, they felt they were indeed near their goal, but no one seemed to understand why anyone in his right mind would want to see a wilderness. Time after time they were advised to take a well-traveled road, directed toward a village or told they could see plenty enough Indians on the streets of Detroit.

"We soon felt it would be impossible to obtain the truth from them in a straightforward manner, and that we must manoeuvre" Tocqueville writes. "We therefore went to the United States' Agent for the sale of wild land, of which there is much in the district of Michigan. We presented ourselves to him as persons who, without having quite made up our minds to establish ourselves in the country, were interested to know the price and situation of the Government lands.

"Major Biddle, the officer, now understood perfectly what we wanted, and entered into a number of details, to which we eagerly listened. 'This part,' he said, 'seems to be best suited to your purpose. The land is good, and large villages are already founded there; the road is so well kept that public conveyances run every day.' 'Well,' we said to ourselves, 'now we know where not to go, unless we intend to travel post over the wilderness.'"

**MAJOR BIDDLE ADVISES THEM:
THEY SET OFF FOR BLOOMFIELD**

"We thanked Major Biddle for his advice, and asked him, with an air of indifference bordering on contempt, toward which side of the district the current of emigration had least tended. "This way," he said, without attaching more importance to his answer than we had seemed to do to our question, "toward the northwest. About Pontiac and its neighborhood, some pretty fair establishments have lately been commenced. But you must not think of fixing yourselves farther off; the country is covered by an almost impenetrable forest, which extends uninterruptedly toward the northwest, full of nothing but wild beasts and Indians.

"We again thanked Major Biddle for his good advice, and determined to take it in a contrary sense. We were beside ourselves with joy at the prospect of at length finding a place which the torrent of European civilization had not yet invaded.

"On the next day, the 23rd of July, 1831, we hired two horses, and having bought a compass and some provisions, we set off with our guns over our shoulders, and our hearts as light as if we had been two schoolboys going home for the holidays."

Thus did Tocqueville and Beaumont set out for Bloomfield, with the advice of Major Biddle.

TOCQUEVILLE FINDS HIS WILDERNESS

While Tocqueville and Beaumont came to Bloomfield eleven years after it was first settled, and encountered the thin line of the first homesteads, the wilderness for which they were searching had only recently been the condition of Bloomfield. If we take a little poetic license, rolling the calendar back to 1818, and using the description of an area somewhat north of us, we'll see Bloomfield exactly as it was when the first pioneer families came to its virgin forests and its oak openings. Tocqueville speaks:

"As we proceeded, we gradually lost sight of the traces of man. Soon all proofs even of savage life disappeared, and before us was the scene that we had so long been seeking—a virgin forest.

"Growing in the middle of the thin brushwood, through which objects are perceived at a considerable distance, was a single clump of full-grown trees, almost all pines or oaks. Confined to so narrow a space, and deprived of sunshine, each of these trees had run up rapidly, in search of air and light. As straight as the mast of a ship, the most rapid grower had overtopped every surrounding object; only when it had attained a higher region did it venture to spread out its branches, and clothe itself with leaves. Others followed quickly in this elevated sphere; and the whole group, interlacing their boughs, formed a sort of immense canopy. Underneath this damp, motionless vault, the scene is different."



Birches in "Wabeek"

MAJESTY AND ORDER; CHAOS AND CONFUSION

"Majesty and order are overhead—near the ground, all is chaos and confusion: aged trunks, incapable of supporting any longer their branches, are shattered in the middle, and present nothing but a sharp jagged point. Others, long loosened by the wind, have been thrown unbroken on the ground. Torn up from the earth, their roots form a natural barricade, behind which several men might easily find shelter. Huge trees, sustained by the surrounding branches, hang in mid-air, and fall into dust, without reaching the ground.

"In the solitude of America all-powerful nature is the only instrument of ruin, as well as of reproduction. Here, as well as in the forests over which man rules, death strikes continually, but there is none to clear away the remains; they accumulate day by day. They fall, they are heaped upon one another. Time alone does not work fast enough to reduce them to dust, so as to make way for their successors. Side by side lay several generations of the dead. Some, in the last stages of dissolution, have left on the grass a long line of red dust as the only trace of their presence; others, already half consumed by time, still preserve their outward shape. Others again, fallen only yesterday, stretch their long branches over the traveler's path."

Bloomfield, as it was in 1818.





“ARCHES OF THE FOREST”—RELIGION WAS ALWAYS IMPORTANT IN BLOOMFIELD

“We said to our host in the inn in Pontiac at which we spent the night after our trek through Bloomfield,” wrote Tocqueville, “The soil of the forests left to themselves is generally marshy and unwholesome; has the settler who braves the misery of solitude no cause to fear for his life?”

“Cultivation, at first, is always a dangerous undertaking,” replied the American, “and there is scarcely an instance of a pioneer and his family escaping, during the first year, the forest fever; sometimes while traveling in the autumn you find all the occupants of a hut attacked by fever, from the emigrant himself down to his youngest child.” “And what becomes of these poor creatures when thus struck by Providence?” “They resign themselves and hope for better times.”

“Do the ministrations of religion ever reach them?”

“Very seldom. As yet we have not been able to set up public worship in our forest. Almost every summer, indeed, some Methodist ministers come to visit the new settlements. The news of their arrival spreads rapidly from dwelling to dwelling: it is the great event of the day. At the time fixed, the emigrant, with his wife and children, makes his way through the scarcely cleared paths in the forest toward the place of meeting. Settlers flock from fifty miles 'round. The congregation has no church to assemble in, they meet in the open air under the arches of the forest. A pulpit of rough logs, great trees cut down to serve as seats. such are the fittings of this rustic temple. The pioneers encamp with their families in the surrounding woods. Here for three days and nights, the people scarcely intermit their devotional exercises. You should see the fervent prayers and the deep attention of these men to the solemn words of the preacher. In the wilderness men are seized with a hunger for religion.”

THE KIRK IN THE HILLS

Tocqueville's inquiries into the religious practices of our pioneer families were made in 1831, the very year the first Presbyterian church was chartered on the shores of Wing Lake, to be followed by Dr. Ezra Parke's Methodist meetings and Deacon Elijah Fish's Presbyterian meetings on the Saginaw Trail.

It's entirely fitting that the aspirations of the first group of settlers, though their denominations differed, should today be expressed in a structure at once the best example of man's efforts to reach toward the Almighty in the building of a cathedral, and yet, in its vaulted ceilings and flying buttresses, a recreation of "the arches of the forest" the pioneer spoke of. This edifice is the Kirk in the Hills.

The Kirk, one of the largest Presbyterian churches in Michigan, is built on land donated by Colonel Edwin S. George. The 30-acre site was the Colonel's own estate, "Cedarholme," and the house is incorporated into the overall building. The Gothic structure, designed by architect Wirt C. Rowland, is a recreation of Scotland's Melrose Abbey, a masterpiece built in 1136 and destroyed in 1570. The Scottish abbey sent the Kirk a stone from the ruins which is embedded in the wall of the Lady Chapel and is marked 1246 A.D.

The Presbytery dedicated the church in 1947, the first service was held in 1952, but before the complex was completed, a million dollar fire in 1957 set construction back for more than a year. During that period services were held in Bloomfield Hills' Andover High School.

Returning to Tocqueville's memoir, it's interesting to note that in the ultra-modern St. Regis Church, in Bloomfield, the tabernacle, lectern and pulpit are reproductions of cut-off tree trunks, an echo of our first settlers forest cathedral.



OLD LAKE MAUMEE COVERED BLOOMFIELD IN PREHISTORIC TIMES

The geological formation of Michigan and particularly of Bloomfield presents a complex picture. Beginning several billion years ago, cataclysm after cataclysm covered our area with four different advancing and receding glaciers. In between upheavals, vegetation and animal life slowly developed, only to disappear with a new earth-shaking disturbance.

Our major concern is with the retreat of the last great glacier. As it melted away a huge lake, Lake Maumee, covered Bloomfield. In its ancestral stage, it was the parent of Lakes Huron and Erie, and in its middle period, ice obstructed the natural outlet of the lake to the east and caused the waters of the two great lakes to extend far beyond their present boundaries.

In this era, the lake covered only the southern half of the Township. The shoreline of Middle Lake Maumee ran from the banks of the Rouge River opposite Franklin Village northeastward, crossing Woodward Avenue at Charing Cross Road. The last bits of the beaches of the lake can be seen in the gravel patches by the stone gateway columns at Charing Cross. The shoreline ran northward from there, crossing Adams Road above Wattles, circling through Troy and entering the Township again midway between Quarton and Maple Roads, moving southwestward and around the lower end of Birmingham south of Maple. The escarps, or steep slopes of the old beaches are visible on the Oakland Hills Golf Course, on holes 8 and 11 on the south course, and 10 and 18 on the north course.

Pockets of water or bays from the lake were left as the water receded, forming not only our 30-odd lakes and ponds, but the gravel pits in the northeast end of the Township as well.



CHARLIE COME HOME

This year, as we're celebrating our 200th birthday as a Nation, it's been suggested that we also celebrate our three billionth year as a land.

It was about that long ago that the land mass we now call the United States of America was formed. Over millenia, as we pointed out, vegetation and animal life alternated with the grinding, sweeping destruction of such life by advancing glaciers, one following another.

Our little Sodon Lake shares the secrets of the first plant life—lichen, hardy Arctic plants, then willows, birches, pines. The harder woods such as oak, elm, hickory, walnut and maple which we see all over Bloomfield today came as the humus became better and better soil.

Along with the warmer climate and better vegetation came Charlie.

Charlie was just a little fellow when he died some 25,000 years ago. He barely weighed two tons and his long curved tusks were only half their full growth. He still had some of his milk teeth. The young mastodon was either sick or injured when he reached the water hole at Charing Cross Road about a quarter mile east of Woodward back about 23,000 B.C. Poor Charlie died there. His fur-covered body fell into the marl bed of the pond and there he remained as the receding waters deposited more marl and made his shallow grave into a mastodon mausoleum.

In September of 1934 A.D. a steamshovel operator deepening the little pond for drainage, uncovered Charlie's body and reported his find to Cranbrook Institute of Science. The bones were carefully excavated and taken to the Paleontology Museum at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Here they were scraped of the marl and reassembled. Charlie's been on exhibition there since.

Charlie's only one of about 150 mastodon remains found in Michigan, but he's ours. He's called the Bloomfield Hills Mastodon, but he was found in Bloomfield Township so let's just call him the Bloomfield Mastodon.

Lets just call him home to Cranbrook for the Bicentennial.



AMERICAN INDIAN INHABITANTS

Fannie Fish, in 1888, presented a paper before the Oakland County Pioneer Society in which she described the hundreds of Indians who came past their house on Woodward north of Lone Pine (now the old red brick Benedict farm) each week. They had been to Detroit to get their bounty, the money paid them for the land, which they spent on food and whiskey before moving up the Saginaw Trail.

These Indians were members of the Chippewa or Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Ottawa, Miami, Sauk, Fox and Mascouten tribes. Some may even have been Wyandots or Hurons who had been driven out of Ontario by the fierce and feared Iroquois.

In any case, they were known as the Young Tradition Indians, named after the first site where their occupation, traced back to about 700 A.D., was found. They were preceded in this area by four other groups, the mastodon-hunting Paleo-Indians, known for their fluted arrowheads; the Old Copper Indians, first to mine that metal; the Woodland Indians who first made pottery; and the Hopewell who took to farming in addition to hunting and fishing.

At the time about which Fannie Fish wrote, there were only an estimated 7,737 Indians in all of Michigan! Those from this area moved northward, and little trace but graves today indicates their presence here. Yet in the early days many white settlers were saved when a compassionate squaw shared her succotash with them, among them Captain Hervey Parke who lived in Birmingham for some time. In 1940 there were only 6,282 Indians in the state, but the number has been on the increase since then.

The Indians of this area were distinguished from others by the round bark huts they built, as opposed to the longhouses built by other Indian groups.



THE GREAT BATTLE BETWEEN THE FOX AND THE CHIPPEWA

Under the heading, "A Good Many Dead Indians," a 1912 history of Oakland County sketches the story told by a French fur trapper named Michaud or Micheau to an early settler, Edwin Baldwin, of a great battle between the Chippewa and the Fox Indian tribes before the coming of the white man.

Michaud, a centenarian when Bloomfield was settled, told of coming upon a Chippewa village on "Swan's Plains," the tableland later settled by Dr. Ziba Swan. In the late 1700s, Michaud was camped along the Rouge River where "Manresa" is today at Quarton and Woodward, and was startled to see Indian feathers passing silently by the rocks. He knew instantly that the Fox were about to attack their ancient enemies, the Chippewa. In the bloody battle which ensued, the Chippewa village, braves, squaws and children, were wiped out. The battling braves followed those trying to escape down the Saginaw Trail which, with the plains, was littered with dead bodies. Michaud described them as numbering 1500.

Early settlers felt he exaggerated, yet history is on Michaud's side. "Swan's Plains" might have been so named because the Indians had cleared the land to build their village with its vegetable gardens. When the Oakland County Road Commission dug down just a short distance to put in the wires for a traffic signal at Quarton and Woodward (the Saginaw Trail) in 1961, they encountered the bones of two young braves, just in the three-foot radius and 42" depth of the hole.

Hinsdale's "Archeological Atlas of Michigan" also located a probable Indian village and burial site within the boundaries of what is now Birmingham.



REPORTS OF THE INTERMINABLE SWAMP

While Detroit had been founded in 1701, the first white settler didn't get to Bloomfield until over a century later. Early reports of the nature of the interior beyond Detroit were discouraging. Surveyor-General for the Northwest Territory, Edward Tiffin, filed a report to General Meigs, Commissioner of the Land Office in Washington, D.C., on November 30, 1815, which read in part: "not one acre out of a hundred, if there be one in a thousand, would in any case admit of cultivation or it is worth the expense of surveying. It is an area of swamp and lakes in between stretches of sandy loam on which scarcely any vegetation grows, except small scrubby oaks."

This report was circulated so widely in the East, where veterans of the War of 1812 were being given bounty lands as compensation, that in the school geography books the words "Interminable Swamp" were written across maps of the interior of Michigan.

In all fairness to Tiffin, he didn't survey the land himself, but had others do it, and as far as Royal Oak, there was a swamp, well known for its impassability and its clouds of mosquitoes which made passage through it almost impossible. Every writer of the period mentions the terrible mosquitoes which could so drain men and animals of blood that they would drop from weakness.



SHOUTS OF JOY

In the early part of the fall of 1818, two groups of men from Detroit decided to see for themselves if the lands in the interior really were "irreclaimable and unfit for culture or occupation, and their obvious destiny must be to remain in possession of wild beasts," as Tiffin's report concluded.

One group mentioned in an article published in the Nov. 13, 1818 issue of the Detroit Gazette, was composed of Governor Lewis Cass, the Rev. John Monteith, David C. McKinstry, Austin E. Wing and Benjamin Stead. The fact that they named Wing, Cass and Elizabeth Lakes after themselves and Mrs. Cass is proof that they did indeed explore this area.

The second group has Major Oliver Williams, Calvin Baker, Jacob Eileet and "other prominent Detroit men" setting out, turning back, and setting out once again. In any case, they passed through the swamps of Royal Oak, traveled along the log road being built by Army Troops under the command of Colonel Leavenworth, and eventually reached the tableland which would soon be called Bloomfield.

The account of their journey was written in 1872 by Thomas Drake for the Oakland Pioneer Society. He tells of their reaction when they first caught sight of Beautiful Bloomfield: "We will not undertake to describe the shouts of joy which burst from their lips as they looked upon the lovely landscapes which were presented to their view. They were enraptured with the scenery. The plains and openings were covered with new and brilliant flowers. After making as full an investigation as their means would allow, having gathered as many flowers and shrubs as they could carry as evidences of the fertility of the soil, they returned to Detroit, after an absence of three or four days.

"The exploration made by this party was the theme of conversation and it undoubtedly led to the formation of the Pontiac Company which held its first meeting November 5, 1818, with the purpose of selling land."



THE FIRST WHITE SETTLERS COME TO BLOOMFIELD

Countless articles have been written about the families who first settled Bloomfield Township. Everyone knows that John W. Hunter and his brother Daniel left their home in Auburn, Cayuga County, New York, in the winter of 1818. They crossed Canada by sleigh and the Detroit River on ice, arriving in Detroit in March. The following July Elisha Hunter, their father, and the rest of the family came on a 21-day trip across Lake Erie on the Schooner "Neptune." The sons, meanwhile, had undoubtedly been looking for the best land available. By the time they found it, two other prospective settlers had also discovered its beauty.

So, to Elijah Willits goes the gold medal for being the first to buy land in Bloomfield Township. He bought his 160 acres on December 1, 1818, as did the second buyer, John Hamilton, but since Willits' certificate bears the number 212 while Hamilton's is 216, presumably Willits received his first.

Meanwhile, back in Detroit, John W. Hunter bought his 160 acres on the following day, December 2. However, it was Hunter who has the title "First Settler of Bloomfield Township" as he erected his log house early in January. It took about ten days to build. Imagine his chagrin when he found out he'd put it up on Hamilton's land! Undaunted, he built another.

The deal was that they were to pay \$2.00 an acre, with \$80 down and three annual installments of \$80 each for the full price of \$320. Actually, each decided against paying the second installment and eventually they paid \$230, or \$1.44 an acre, after renegotiation.

Anyone for the four corners of Woodward and Maple at \$1.44 an acre?

The fact that each family opened a tavern might have been simple good business. The only route through the wilderness to the Pontiac Company's settlement and on to Saginaw was the Saginaw Trail, now Woodward Avenue. Settlers moving north had to stop and rest, so the word tavern meant the hospitality offered was on a paying basis.

BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP

ORIGINAL LAND OWNERS

[illegible]

HEIGH-HO FOR A LONG SLEIGH RIDE

If it seems strange that the early settlers arrived in the middle of winter, the most difficult time in which to survive, the answer lies in the fact that transportation by sleigh was the easiest mode of travel.

The swamps around Royal Oak, with their clouds of stinging mosquitoes, made summer travel almost impossible. Our first residents, all emigrating from New York and the New England states, came via the Erie Canal to Buffalo and there took the steamer "Walk-in-the-Water" or one of its successors such as the "Superior" the 400 miles across Lake Erie. From Detroit they traveled to Bloomfield via Mount Clemens and up the Clinton River.

Land and rivers could be far more easily traversed by sleigh in January than by ox-cart and boat the remainder of the year.

From the memoirs of Hervey Parke and Amasa Bagley we can put together this description of the journey:

"We started from home in the winter of 1818. First we disposed of all of our furniture, as it would not do to transport it so great a distance, and there remained two large chests and several trunks in which our bedding and clothing were packed, including also a large strong cask, in which, after removing the chime hoops, I had placed one large seven-pail kettle, inside that a smaller one, then several still smaller until it was quite filled. A log chain and some other iron articles added, made this cask a weighty affair, and caused many a tough fellow to say hard words when attempting to move it.

We started on runners with wheels and running gear lashed on the sleigh, with box and seat, so if the snow left, we could still proceed upon our journey. With a last look at our eastern home, we set out and came all the way with that rig, changing to wheels as occasion required, arriving, after many weeks, at Detroit, and commencing thence to Bloomfield."

Now **that** was a long sleigh ride.



THE LOG HOUSE

The first thing the settler had to do was build shelter for his family. This meant felling trees and piling them up at right angles, sealing the cracks with mud or some lime compound if it were at hand, and raising a roof with enough pitch to it to allow the water to run off. The wooden fireplace occupied the entire back wall and the precious copper pans were placed by it.

As we saw in the case of the Hunter family, it took about ten days to build such a log house. The words "log house" occur constantly in early histories, and the words "log cabin" rarely if ever. The settlers did not consider themselves untutored hillbillies, but educated people out to carve a new life for themselves. They didn't live in log cabins, they lived in log houses, albeit both had the same materials and the same dimensions.

The floor was earthen at first, and later hand hewn logs made the base more livable. The main room was on the ground floor, and the children slept in the loft, entering it from an outside crude ladder and waking on winter mornings to find a drift of snow across their homespun quilts. An early history tells that boys and girls went barefoot until a shoemaker came along. On those cold winter mornings, barefoot boys raced from the log house to the edge of the woods, where the cows bedded overnight, and stood where the cows had laid until their feet were warm enough to drive the cows to the barn for milking. Each house had its bible and its box of tea, brewed only on Sundays as it cost \$2.00 a pound, equal to perhaps one third the family's store of cash. Sugar and salt were expensive luxuries.

The basic shelter provided for, the entire family turned to hacking away at the trees to allow the sun to reach the little garden. Bark was cut from other trees above the roots, preventing the sap from rising so the foliage would die and let in more sun. The race against time for the first crop of potatoes and corn meant survival, as did shooting game in the forest such as wild turkeys and passenger pigeons whose breasts could be dried and stored in the cracks of the house against winter.



INSIDE THE LOG HOUSE, A CHEERFUL FIRE, A HAPPY FAMILY

We owe most of our glimpses into life in early days here to two chroniclers—Captain Hervey Parke and Miss Fannie Fish. Fannie lived in the house pictured on page 23, first in the original log part and later in the brick addition. She wrote this reminiscence of her mother's life for the Oakland Pioneer Society.

"The small house was not a pretentious affair; my father used to say he measured the few articles of furniture they possessed and built his house to fit them. I do not know its dimensions, but will venture to say it afforded them a comfortable shelter. What if the walls were composed of unhewn logs, and the floor of the same, split and hewn as smoothly as might be. The great stone fireplace may not have been beautiful in itself, but when filled with a cheerful blaze that shone out upon a spotless floor, and lit up the farthest corners of the little room, it must have been a pleasant sight. A muslin curtain, dainty white, I imagine, shaded the one little window.

"The year of 1820 my mother always spoke of as the very happiest of many happy years. The two little boys played about the door, the fair babe smiled in her cradle, and the mother, with heart full to overflowing with hope and happiness, went about her household cares.

"There were hard places, no doubt, days of discouragement and nights of weariness. One day's work of man and team must be paid for with four days of hard labor, and yet these days were referred to by both of my parents as very happy ones, and the impression left on my mind by the story so often told was not of a time of great hardship, but of keen enjoyment, and I believe, when at the close of day they bowed their heads at their humble hearth stone and my father returned unfeigned thanks for the goodness and mercy that had followed them this far, they both truly felt that their lives had fallen unto them in pleasant places; yea, that theirs was a goodly heritage."

The room pictured here is a recreation of an early house in the Township, done in authentic detail by Mr. and Mrs. A. David Pottinger in their home on Quarton Road.



FAMILY GROUPS EMIGRATED IN THE EARLY DAYS

We can easily trace the next settlers as they bought land and built log houses along the Saginaw Trail going north. Rarely did a man or a couple arrive alone. They were accompanied by relatives ranging from parents, sisters and brothers and their husbands and wives to nephews and neices. Three generations was a usual group.

Since women in this era were rarely referred to in legal or even historical annals, the relationship of the men to one another was the customary phrase. "Dr. Ziba Swan and his son-in-law Sidney Dole" the accounts say. When the Swans arrived in 1821 and settled near the Rouge at Quarton and Woodward today, they also had other local connections. Daniel Ball, who lived in Birmingham, was the father of Horatio Ball of the famous and infamous Ball Line Road, and Horatio was Dr. Swan's brother-in-law. Daniel's friend, Captain Hervey Parke sent for his brother, Dr. Ezra Parke, and the Dr. Parkes' built their house on the west side of Woodward at Lone Pine Road. Another resident, Harry O. Bronson, was Hervey Parke's brother-in-law. Opposite them were the Fishes, Deacon Elijah and his demented brother, Juni. Juni escaped one night and committed the Township's first two murders, doing in a Mrs. Utter and her daughter with an axe. The Fishes' daughter was the first white child born in Bloomfield. Typically, we don't know her first name although we know she lived just eight years.

The next family north was Judge Amasa Bagley and his son-in-law, William Morris, near Long Lake Road. Father and son Asa and Lemuel Castle lived to the northeast and Daniel Ferguson, Major Joseph Todd, Asa B. Hadsell and Colonel David Stanard were the other residents to the north.

To complete the story of the nameless women who were our pioneers, when their husbands died they were listed on later tax rolls as Widow Chafee, or simply Mrs. Dole.

If there were other settlers in 1821 in the wilderness beyond the trail, history hasn't told us of them, but shortly these forested lands and clear lakes would ring with the sound of the axe as well.





TATTERED AND WELL-THUMBED, THE OLD TOWNSHIP MINUTES AND "THE BOOK OF ESTRAYS" REVEAL OUR HISTORY

Verifying the arrival dates of our pioneer families becomes a fascinating preoccupation. County tract records tell us who bought each parcel of land from the government, but they don't reveal whether the purchaser settled or merely bought for speculation.

There are several sure ways to determine who was here when.

Our most valuable record is the old hand-written book of minutes of each annual Township meeting beginning in 1827. There were more than 50 posts to fill, from supervisor and clerk through pound masters and poor masters, to road overseers and fence viewers. There were not enough men in the Township to fill all these responsibilities, but as the population increased, more names were entered until in 1833 the docket was at full strength. Obviously, anyone whose name appears in this book in any given year was actually here in that year.

Next, imagine how valuable a cow, horse or hog was to a pioneer. In spite of the little bell around its neck to locate it in the dense forest, animals strayed away. If they were lucky enough to escape the wolves and wind up in someone else's enclosure, it was incumbent upon the finder to record a description of the animal in the "Book of Estrays" at the pound master's house. The signed descriptions are another permanent record of our first settlers.

Determining the age of a house is another matter. Building permits were not issued until the 1930s, early taxation was not on dwellings but only on personal property, so only word-of-mouth will give you even a clue as to the date on which an old house was erected. In our search for the oldest house still standing in the Township proper, we had to rely on architectural features and the use of certain building materials to determine which was the earliest of the houses still standing. The contestants and the winner follow shortly.

OUR FIRST POSTAL ADDRESS WAS "BLOOMFIELD, MICHIGAN"

Contact with relatives and friends must have been kept up, in spite of the difficulties of sending and receiving mail, since we see the relatives of the first settlers following them out to Michigan.

Actually, it was very early that we had our first official post office, just two years after the Hunters had built their original log house. On March 24, 1821, President James Monroe established the first post office with a charter to Dr. Ezra Parke and the designation "Bloomfield." A carrier on horseback brought the mail from Detroit and local families saddled up the mare, hitched the horse to the buggy or walked to Dr. Parke's house on the northwest corner of Lone Pine and Woodward to pick it up. The house is still there.

Earliest reports seem to agree that Sidney Dole was postmaster, but Dr. Parke was named in the charter.

Today, there is no "Bloomfield, Michigan" as we have no official post office any more. While the Township's population is now sixteen times larger than that of Bloomfield Hills and double that of Birmingham, all residents use one or the other as their postal address. Rarely does anyone say "I'm from Bloomfield Township." It's "Bloomfield Hills" or "Birmingham." Similarly, other records suffer. In the prestigious Burton Historical Collection at the main library in Detroit, there is not a single card in the index file for Bloomfield Township, although there are many for the two cities within our boundaries.

*The Dr. Ezra Parke house at Woodward
Avenue and Lone Pine Road*



THE HUNTER HOUSE—THE EARLIEST FRAME HOUSE IN BLOOMFIELD

John West Hunter replaced his original (second) log house with a frame house in 1822. We know from history that Hunter possessed that much-in-demand commodity, a team of oxen and a wagon. We also know that one of the first activities of the Pontiac Company was to erect a sawmill.

These facts, along with the appearance at Hunter's of an itinerant carpenter named George Taylor who had a reputation for being the best in the business, allow us to picture the circumstances under which the house was built on the southeast corner of Maple and Woodward.

Taylor never bought land here nor settled, so we conjecture that in 1822 it was now or never for the frame house to be built. We can see Hunter, on an off day when his team was not rented to plow a field or carry some produce into Detroit, taking the Saginaw Trail northwest to Pontiac and returning with a load of lumber cut with the mill's bandsaw.

Houses in the East, where the Hunters had come from four years before, were built with vertical siding of random widths, fastened as precisely as possible to one another with wooden dowels and then affixed to a sill at the bottom, and a girt, also with wooden dowels. Fireplaces at that time generally covered almost one whole wall. In the original house it must have been the north wall at the gable end of the house.

Over the years the house underwent not only many alterations, but three moves. From its original location on the Saginaw Trail it was moved in 1893 to 264 West Brown Street, then known as Freemont, and then on July 24, 1970, it was moved to its present location in the Birmingham Historical Park on Maple near Southfield.

The house was restored in one of its later periods, about the 1849-1850 era. The horizontal wood siding of that period covered the old vertical planking in the front portion of the house, there was a wing or "ell" added, as was a "Michigan Porch," and the fireplace is now on the west wall.



THE SEARCH FOR THE TOWNSHIP'S OLDEST HOUSE STILL STANDING

CANDIDATE #3—THE LOG CABIN “FEATHERS PASS BY THE WINDOW”

This little log cabin has been sitting on Lone Pine Road near Tully Court for 137 years. Dubliner William Craig claimed the land as a grant from the government and built the cabin for himself and his wife Sara in 1839. In its one room, 16 feet by 22 feet, their thirteen children, including two sets of twins, were born.

In 1958, the Craigs' granddaughter, Mrs. Bessie M. Bogardus, then 73 years old, told of life in the little cabin as her mother had told her. The children slept in the tiny loft under homespun blankets while their parents slept downstairs. Uninvited guests in the form of a band of Indians who camped across the road, would push open the door, glide in, and without a word, sleep for the night on the floor in front of the banked fire.

Sara Craig, brought up in Boston, was terrified of the Indians until one day two hunters tried to hassle her for money while her husband was away in Detroit. Just as she turned to get the money, she saw two Indian feathers pass by the cabin's window. In a moment the Indians had entered and run off the marauders, establishing themselves from then on as Mrs. Craig's protector. She, in turn, often baked bread for them.

Life in the little cabin was hard. At the age of 12 or at the most 13, William Craig turned out each child, son and daughter alike, to make his or her own way in the world. Mrs. Bogardus' mother went to live with the George H. Mitchell family, co-founders with Almeron Whitehead, of "The Eccentric." The Mitchells were very kind to her and she later married Andrew Quick of Pontiac and remained there until her death at age 90 in 1951.





*The Log Cabin - Bloomfield Twp.
1839*

Ralph Brackett - 1976

CANDIDATE #2—THE ELIJAH BULL HOUSE “OLD OAK”

On the southeast shore of Wing Lake, on land originally owned by Sheriff Austin E. Wing, possibly on a land grant, Elijah Bull bought 160 acres on a patent signed by President Andrew Jackson October 1, 1829, as the assignee of Austin E. Wing.

Here he built first a log house, and then, in 1833, a frame house to shelter his bride Melinda and later their ten children. He fashioned a wrought-iron doorknocker shaped like an oak leaf with an acorn clapper and called his house “Old Oak.”

Bull was a religious man, and as assistant to the Rev. Hornell received the first charter of a Presbyterian church in this area on June 1, 1831. He built a church on his property and was active in it until his death August 9, 1871. The church didn't long survive him, and the abandoned building was eventually moved to a site across the road on the Pickering Farm and used as a barn. It was struck by lightening and burned down in 1922.

“How do you turn a church into a barn?” Homer Case once asked Helen Pickering. “Well, I guess you don't” Mrs. Pickering replied mildly, “It was struck by lightning, wasn't it?”

The house has had six owners since the Bulls, and has undergone many renovations and updatings. Today the six-inch planks of white pine on the floors and the old huge fireplace with its brick oven are about the only portions of the original house remaining.

Still, it does qualify as one of our oldest houses.



CANDIDATE #1 THE WINNER!

THE GILBERT LAKE HOUSE

Joseph Gilbert bought his 160 acres on Gilbert Lake on June 24th, 1823. While he's not mentioned in any of our early county histories, his name does appear in 1829 in the Bloomfield Township annual meeting records as an overseer of highways. He held this position for four years until 1833 when his name disappears from the records.

Later the farm changed hands many times, eventually becoming part of the Peabody Farms, but in 1898 it was still known as "Gilbert Lake Farm."

Three rooms remain from the original farmhouse, which has been added to many times. In the room pictured here we can see the hand-carved beams. The original fireplace was made smaller in succeeding renovations, but still retained for a long time its wooden ancestry. In the early days, fireplaces were of wood with a heavy clay cover, but had to be watched carefully so they would not catch fire and burn down the log house.

The family fire had to be tended carefully, as if it went out, there was no way to start it again except to go to the nearest neighbor's house and beg a few hot coals. The children were often dispatched on this errand and brought back the coals in a brass pan to rekindle the fire.

An interesting point about the Gilbert Lake Farm is the existence of two large stones, one with the inscription 1864 and one 1867. The 1877 County History notes the existence of a private cemetery on the southwestern side of Gilbert Lake. It notes that the first interment was that of Joseph Gilbert's wife, Nancy. "From being a cluster of family graves it came to be used as a place of interment by the inhabitants of the vicinity, until in this, as in the other old graveyards of Bloomfield, the number of silent occupants has become very large."



BLOOMFIELD'S CENTENNIAL FARM CANDIDATE

Depicting the charm of the long farming era, the Russell Pickering house on Franklin Road south of Maple reminds us of other, quieter days, of apples and cider and long winters and blossom-scented springs.

"Why I used to go there to buy apples" people comment in surprise when they see this picture of the house. The farm has been in the Pickering family for 96 years, and in three years it will be officially designated a Centennial Farm. It's the only one left in the whole of Bloomfield which can qualify for this distinction.

Some years ago the state of Michigan began to identify and certify Centennial Farms. In order to qualify, the farm must have been in the same family for over 100 years, and while it isn't essential that an actual house be on the land, it is mandatory that the farm continues to sell produce. For a ten-acre farm, at least \$50 worth must be sold, and \$250 for any lesser acreage. This automatically rules out all other Bloomfield candidates as there are no other 100-year old properties which still farm to sell. Others which might have qualified are now purely residential.

Russell Pickering didn't live to receive his certificate carrying the Great Seal of Michigan and signed by the governor, or affix his metal plaque to the house, as he died last year. Mrs. Pickering and their children plan to continue to operate the farm, now 50 acres, and they'll receive the designation in 1979.



Russell Pickering Home

*Ralph Brackett 1976 ©
George Balocating*

FOUNDING FAMILIES AND CENTENNIAL FAMILIES

While we have only one Centennial Farm candidate, we have many families in the Township who can qualify for the designation "Centennial Family."

Last November the Michigan Genealogical Council inaugurated a program under which families whose forebears have lived in Michigan continuously for 100 years or more can apply for a Centennial certificate.

Here in the Township we also have families which we categorize "Founding Families," present-day citizens who trace their origins back to pioneers or founders. The criteria is that the ancestor must have bought his land directly from the government, not from a previous owner, even a non-resident owner. In short, he must have bought his land, settled on it and remained here.

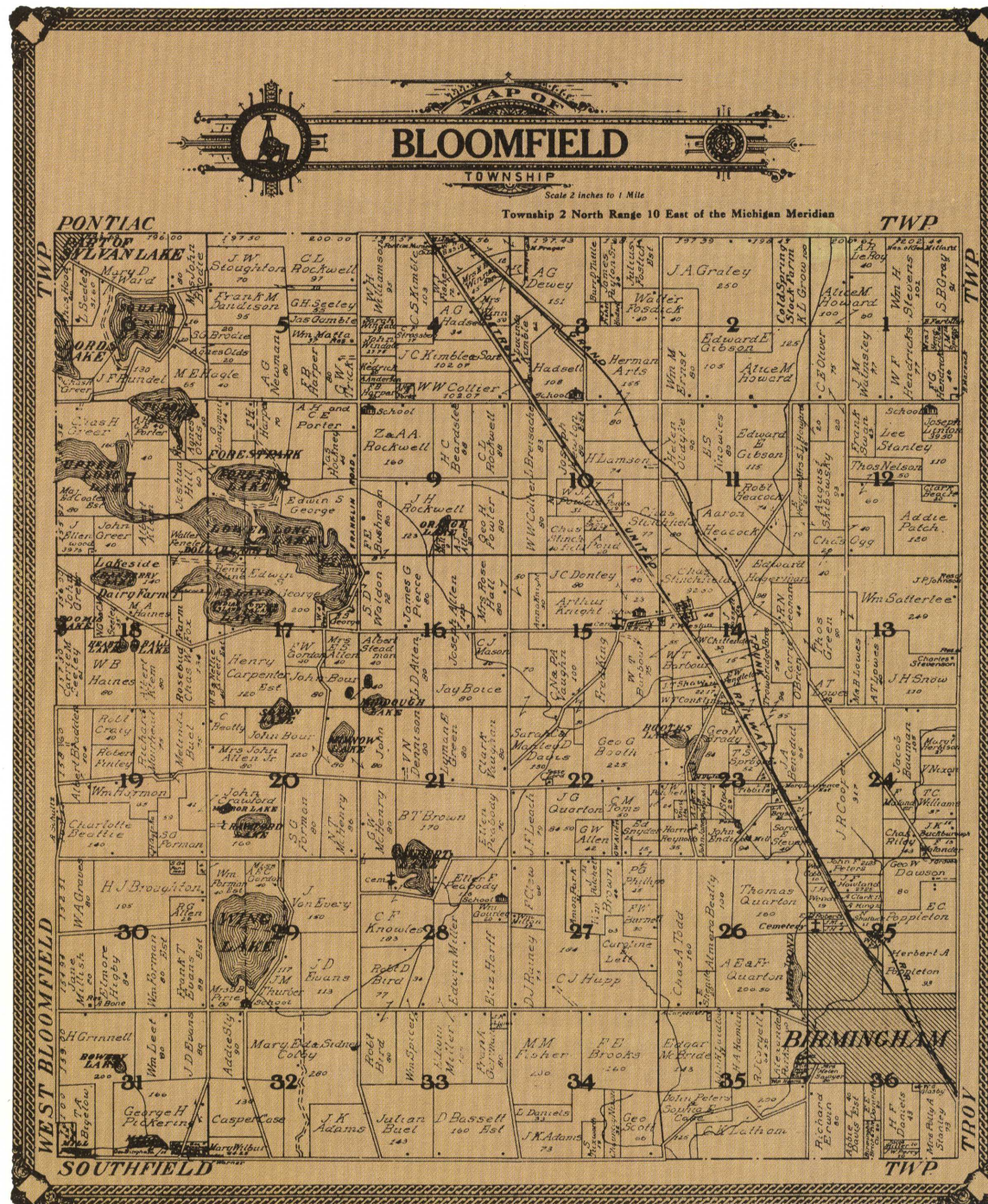
Several families are eligible for this honor, with their ancestors going back in an unbroken line to pioneer families such as that of Polly and John Vaughan, who first bought land in 1824, and Wilkes Durkee and Nathaniel Case, who were also here in the early 1820s.

We have one Founding Family who can trace their ancestry back not only to one pioneer but two. This is the Case family who go back in a direct line to both Cases and Durkees.

It's interesting to note that all through these families there is a record of public service, with almost every generation active in Bloomfield Township government, school boards, and other matters of importance to a good community. From Wilkes Durkee, who was named to office in the very first Township board meeting May 25, 1827, we trace active participation of many Durkees, Cases and Vaughans, to Perry Vaughan, who was supervisor of the Township for twenty years from 1931 to 1950, and to the present supervisor Homer Case who's been active in the Township for twenty years.



The Beardslee house gardens



The 1872 Oakland County Atlas map

THE INTERTWINING OF CENTENNIAL FAMILIES

If we trace just four of our many Centennial families we immediately see that there were many intermarriages among them when the Township was sparsely settled. For instance:

William Forman sailed from England with his wife Harriet and six children in 1854, and after two years in Ohio settled in Bloomfield where another six children were born. Samuel Gaylord Forman's birth occurred on September 15, 1858, in the house now occupied by Mrs. Leland Forman and her son Gaylor at Franklin and Quarton Roads.

Cooper Pickering and his wife Elizabeth arrived in Michigan also from Lincolnshire, England, as did Thomas and Rosanna Allen. Each family had a number of children, and eventually all three families settled in sections 30 and 31 in Bloomfield, all before 1860.

Nathaniel Higby came to West Bloomfield in the late 1830s and his son Elmore was born there and moved later to Bloomfield.

Henry C. Beardslee was born in Independence Township August 28, 1846, and came to Bloomfield Township in 1879, settling on 88 acres in Section 9 south of Hickory Grove between Lahser and Franklin Roads.

Samuel G. Forman married Jennie Pickering.
Sarah Pickering married Elmore Higby.
Charlotte Forman married George Pickering.
Floyd Beardslee married Aurilla Higby.
Ermina H. Forman married Robert Allen.

The Beardslee daughters, Mrs. Donald S. Brownlee and Mrs. John Malcolm, still own the Beardslee house on Square Lake Road, although they live elsewhere.

The Centennial families, branching in all directions with double Centennial ancestry, are a tiny percentage of our 48,000 families today, but they represent the best of early Bloomfield.



THE CASE FAMILY—DIRECT DESCENDANTS OF TWO EARLY PIONEERS

Nathaniel Case bought his land on the northeast corner of Maple and Lahser October 12, 1822. We're not exactly sure when he and his son Leman settled, but both their names appear first in the Township records of 1831 and 1832 as road overseers.

Of the Cases other pioneer ancestor, Wilkes Durkee, we know a great deal more. He was a most interesting man. His Welsh ancestors left the home country in 1715 and his grandfather settled in New York State. It was there, in Scipio, Cayuga County, that Wilkes was born in 1762, and from there, at age 57 he and his family came to Michigan to buy property and settle.

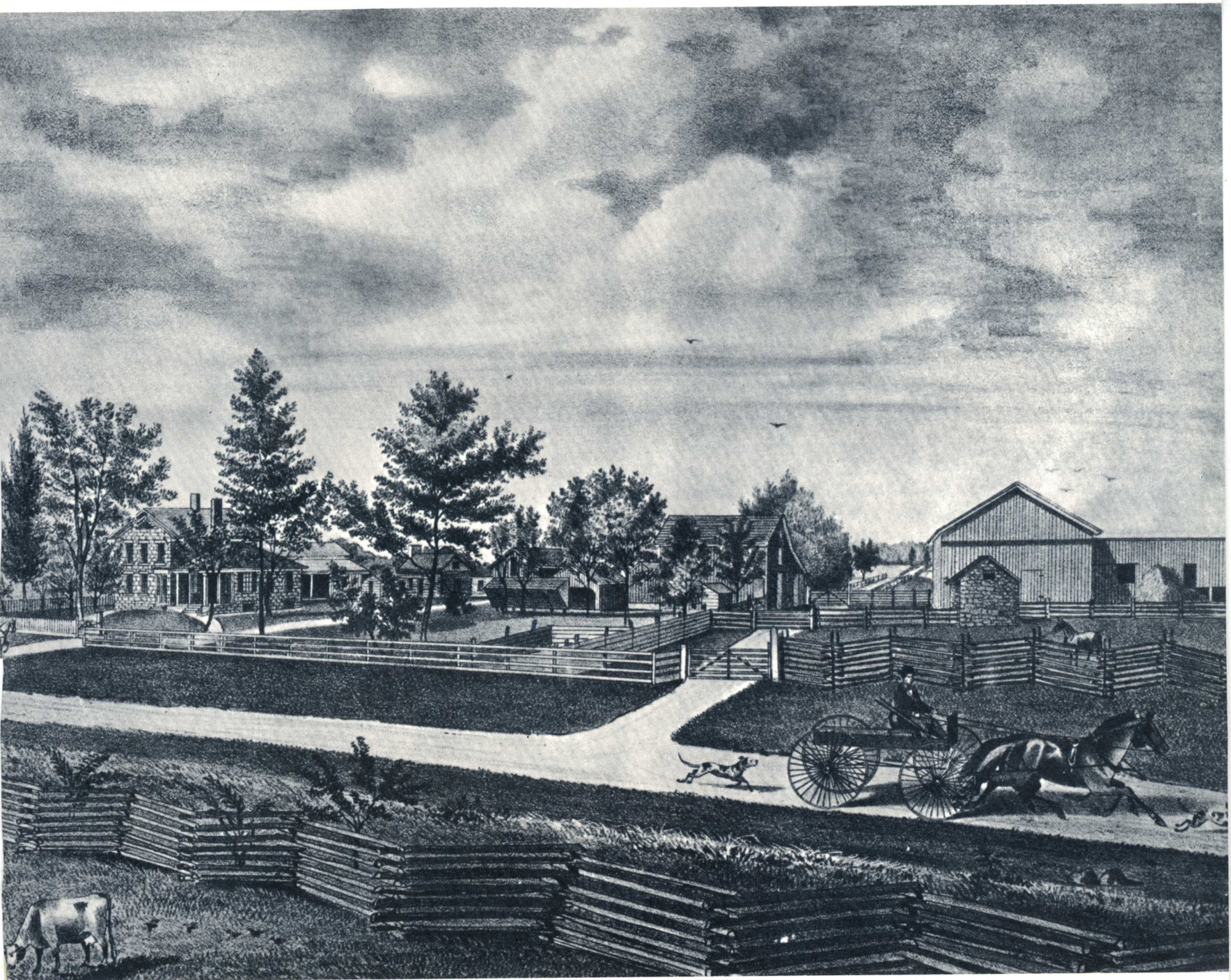
While most of our pioneer founders were almost penniless—Hervey Parke had exactly \$8.50 when he was age 33, and others had literally only pennies left after buying their land—Wilkes was wealthy. He brought \$1,000 in silver and proceeded to buy good land and become the richest man in the Township. He soon had over 100 acres in wheat and the largest herds of cattle and sheep in Bloomfield.

At first he built a conventional log house, lived in it with his large family for eight years, then built a big double house of oak logs, one and one half stories high at one end and two and a half stories at the other, as the ground was not flat. He lived there until his death on December 22, 1844, of a stroke, at age 78.

His several sons continued the development of the farm, and sometime after 1850 both Stephen and William, as well as the Vaughans, Bassetts and Slys, had stone houses built for them. An interesting question is who built these houses, all which bear the mark of one stonemason.

Pictured here is the Farm of Phillip Durkee, Homer Case's great-grandfather, built by Phillip's father Stephen, some time after 1850. It's an illustration from the 1877 Durant History of Oakland County. Also pictured here is the house as it is today, completely unchanged and serene amidst a landscape entirely altered.





ANOTHER FOUNDING FAMILY— VAUGHANS AND WICKHAMS

John and Polly Vaughan bought land from the government beginning in 1824, the forerunner of many hundreds of acres the Vaughan family would own in Bloomfield. They had ten children, three sons and seven daughters, and on John's death in 1833 the sons, Richard, Andrew and Abraham, inherited the property with the exception of bequests of eight acres each to the seven daughters, who also were to receive \$100 each on reaching the age of 21.

Abraham went to California in the gold rush of 1848, but returned in the early 1850s and acquired more land. Of his four sons and one daughter, most continued to live in this area. His son Clark was the father of Perry Vaughan, who was Township supervisor from 1931 to 1950. Perry's daughter, Mrs. John B. Hammond, lives in Bloomfield Hills.

Caty Ann, Polly and John's oldest daughter, married Calvin Wickham, who, while not a founder, bought land in the early 1850s, and his line is therefore also a Centennial family. Their great-great granddaughter is Mrs. Harold R. Roehm, who lives in the Township on the same eight acres Caty Ann Vaughan Wickham inherited in 1833. Many other Vaughan descendants still live in the Bloomfield area.



A STONEMASON NAMED PURDY BUILT HOUSES FOR FOUNDING FAMILIES

Dating the stone houses, five of which still stand in our Township, has become a fascinating mystery. There exists no proof positive of the creator of these sturdy houses which have so easily withstood the ravages of time.

However, clues come along which lead to conjecture. In the Oakland County Portrait and Biographical Album of 1891, there is mention of an Irish stonemason, Hugh Purdy, who came from County Armagh in 1850 with his wife Margaret and several sons, and settled in Southfield. Hugh Purdy was Mrs. Leland Forman's great-grandfather. The Purdys and the Hannas of Birmingham intermarried in several generations.

Mrs. Forman thinks Hugh Purdy was the builder of these houses, but George Purdy, one of the original Hugh Purdy's sons, was also a stonemason, and other members of the family think perhaps it was he who built the houses. Since he was born about 1850, this would date the houses later.

The buildings can still be seen today. The one pictured is on Echo Road. One stands at Lahser and 14 Mile, the Wing Lake School is on Maple at Wing Lake and the Vaughan house is on Lahser north of Lone Pine. The latter two houses are pictured in the book in different connections.



Original Stone House

Ralph Brackett 1976

THE VAN EVERY GRISTMILL, ALIAS THE CIDER MILL

In the fall of each year, thousands of people jam into the intersection of 14 Mile and Franklin Roads to buy cider and eat hot doughnuts at the Franklin Cider Mill. If you asked them where the cider mill was located, they'd be sure to say "Why in the village of Franklin, of course" but actually, the Cider Mill is just across the line in Bloomfield Township.

It was in 1832 that Edward Matthews, son of an Irish refugee, making plans to invest his capital in lots and enterprises, as the jargon of the day went, bought land from Scriba Blakeslee and Edward Ellerby and started building a flouring mill on the stream the land boasted. He employed Joseph Gilbert, of Gilbert Lake fame, to get out the timber for him, and Gilbert apparently got out the finest timber possible for the mill. Matthews ran out of steam, out of funds, and out of Bloomfield, and in 1837 Colonel Peter Van Every, of Detroit, exchanged his holdings of land in the city for the Matthews property and the plans for the mill. Within a year, with the help of a millwright named William A. Pratt, the mill was operable.

In the late 1830's it was the only mill operating in its vicinity and it was quite profitable.

Also profitable, ah yes! was the distillery built on the east side of the road, still in the Township. This place of business sold a gallon of good whiskey for 25 cents, and this history wouldn't dream of relating stories of how patrons of the distillery who had imbibed a bit much on the premises, were unceremoniously rolled out of the window and into the Franklin stream to regain a cool head.

Homer Case tells another story about the Van Every mill and the day "Dude" Van Every saw a young lad in the mill pond going down for the third time. A strong, powerful man, Dude reached in and pulled out the boy. Homer had been warned countless times not to play near the mill pond, but he didn't learn his lesson until the day Dude saved his life. He never played there again.



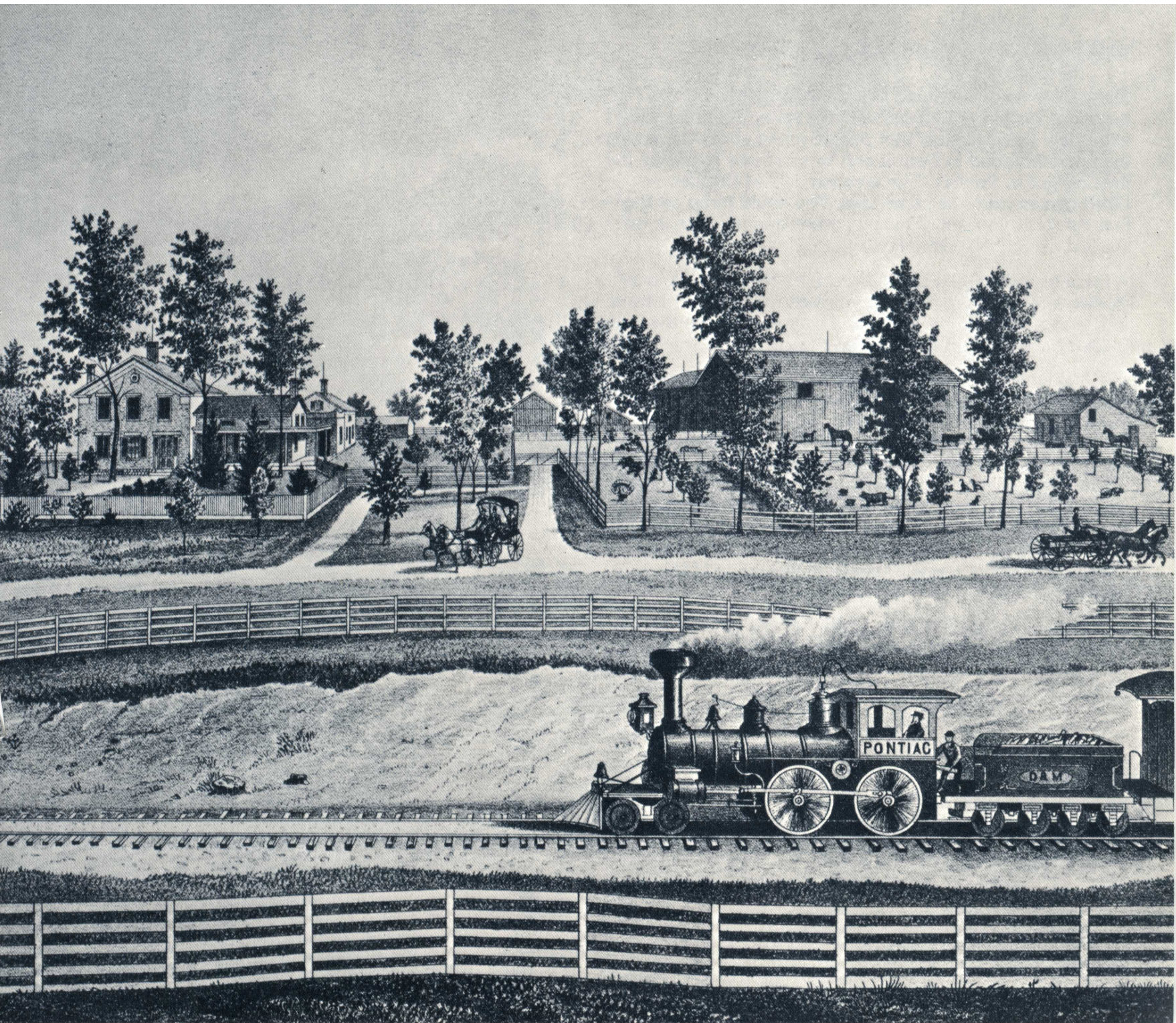
Van Every Gristmill 1837

*Ralph Brackett 1976 ©
George Balocating*

THE RAILROAD COMES TO BLOOMFIELD

The first train entered Bloomfield Township in 1839. It was horse drawn, with open boxes instead of railroad cars. A colorful character named Alfred "Old Sault" Williams with his partner Sherman Stevens of Pontiac controlled the line, called the Detroit and Pontiac Railroad. Old Sault was well known as a practical joker although the joke was on the early residents when they discovered he'd cornered the entire salt market and charged outrageous prices for the commodity. This is why he was called Old Sault.

Williams decided that a thriving little town like Birmingham should have a regular steam locomotive in keeping with the community's progressive spirit. He advertised in the papers that beginning June 1, 1839, two steam trains a day would operate between Detroit and Birmingham. People made a picnic out of the great day, and stood in open-mouthed wonder as a sure-enough steam locomotive chugged into town. It was quite a sight in the parade in 1840, decorated with evergreens and flowers. This was the first railroad chartered in the Northwest Territory. Since this was only a decade after the first trains had been imported from England to this country in 1829, it was quite a marvel for this rural area, and greatly increased the citizens' ability to get their produce to the market in Detroit.



OLD SAULT RACES THE HUCKLEBERRY LINE

Many tales revolve around Old Sault. The favorite one describes his frequent races with the train. The train was extremely slow, so slow that people joked about the young man who boarded in Detroit and was old and feeble by the time he got to Pontiac. The nickname "The Huckleberry Line" comes from the same idea. You could jump off the first car, pick your fill of huckleberries and jump back on the last car with no difficulty.

A favorite trick of Old Sault's, much as he loved his locomotive and regarded it as human, was to load up the train in Pontiac, hitch up his horse and wagon and race the train to Detroit. What's more, he always won!

The last legend of Old Sault describes how he'd conceived the idea of building the station over the tracks with large swinging doors at each end which were closed at night. One night, someone forgot to open the doors as the train was approaching with Old Sault himself at the throttle. Folklore has it that Williams thought the train would have sense enough to stop on its own and wait for admittance; sad but true his beloved locomotive failed to live up to his expectations and the resultant crash as it went through both sets of doors made a complete wreckage of the whole building.

Old Sault lost the railroad in 1840. For the next century it had a series of owners and a series of names until it became part of the Grand Trunk system as it is today.