

Biking Through History

Bloomfield Township – Sections 23, 24, 13, 12, and 1

The following is a list of the various historic areas that one encounters while riding along Charing Cross Road and Squirrel Road from Woodward Avenue to Auburn Road – about five miles.

1. **Start at Quarton and Chesterfield Roads where the Endicott Farm was located** - Chesterfield Road from Quarton to Woodward passes through what from 1872 to 1905 was the **William Smith** property (about 100 acres), and from 1905 through 1954 was the **John Endicott Farm**. John Endicott operated a dairy farm on this 100+ acre parcel. About 1910 he built the house that still stands at the top of the rise at 290 Chesterfield Road.
The Endicott Farm was subdivided into residential building lots in two phases. In 1925 the portion along Quarton Road between Endicott Lake and Cranbrook Road was officially platted into the **Brookwood** subdivision (45 acres). It includes the decorative stone wall and columns at Chesterfield and Quarton. It also contains: Cabot Place, Lowell Court, and Woodberry Drive.
Then, in 1955, the larger portion of the Endicott Farm to the east of Endicott Lake was platted into the **Lakewood Heights** subdivision (63 acres) and includes Chesterfield Road, Lakewood Drive, Hilltop Lane, and Endicott Lane. This was the end of Endicott Farm. In the process of developing these residential subdivisions, the original farmhouse and all of the original farm buildings were demolished. However, John Endicott's 1910 house still stands prominently at 290 Chesterfield Road
2. Stone-lined mill race for the **Morris Saw Mill** (ca 1860) later (1874) known as **Smith Saw and Cider Mill**– on the south side of Chesterfield Road just east of Lowell Court and Woodberry Circle. The Saw Mill operated here from 1830 until approximately 1908.
3. **290 Chesterfield**, - This interesting house with the wrap around veranda on the southeast corner of Chesterfield and Endicott Road was built about 1921.
4. **340 Chesterfield** – The house may have originally been built by F. T. Buchanan who owned the 1.74 acre parcel from August 1916 through October 1937. It has recently undergone extensive expansion and remodeling.
5. **Masonic Temple Building** – on the southwest corner of Chesterfield and Woodward Avenue Prior to the building of the Masonic Temple structure, *The Village (Woman's) Club* owned the property and had planned to build on it. Instead they chose to purchase and renovate an historic house at 190 E. Long Lake Road near the Bloomfield Open Hunt Club near Kensington Road

Cross Woodward Ave.

6. **Charing Cross Road** – This road was one of the main routes followed by early pioneers as they traveled to Birmingham from the Clinton River area. The road appears on maps as far back as 1857 (and perhaps earlier). No name is given to this road on maps until the 1916 McAlpine map of Bloomfield Township. On this map the road is identified as Charing Cross Road.

When Judson Bradway platted the W ½ of Section 24 into the **Bloomfield Estates** subdivision (see No. 9 below) the name Charing Cross Road was given to this old pioneer trail. The road is mentioned in some of the deeds of the 1800s as the “Angling” Road. Note that on the maps of 1929 and 1930, Chesterfield Road between Quarton and Woodward Avenue is also named Charing Cross. And in some of the property deeds in the early 1920s, it is also called “Cooper Road”, probably for the James R. Cooper Farm (See No. 9 below).

7. **Entrance Columns at Charing Cross Road** and Woodward mark one of the entrances to Bloomfield Estates Subdivision. The first entrance columns were built by developer Judson Bradway about 1915. These were quite different from the present pillars and were each topped with a large ornate lantern. (See Ref. e below for pictures of these original pillars.) The original gate pillars were torn down in 1925 during the major project to widen Woodward Avenue
The present art deco pillars were built by the Bloomfield Estates Development Association between 1925 and 1930 after the Wider Woodward Avenue project was completed. They cost about \$4,000. It is believed that these columns were designed by famed architect Eliel Saarinen. When first built, the new columns also may have had electric lights built in, but these have long been extinguished due to corroded conduit and wiring. One can see evidence of the conduit at the base of each pillar, and on the back side of the south pillar there is still an old rusted electrical junction box. (See Ref. d below.)
Note: the north-bound lanes of Woodard Avenue occupy what was the original (1848) Right Of Way for the *Detroit and Pontiac Railroad* – Relocated in 1930
8. **Middle Maumee Beach** – The southerly entrance column stands on the sand and gravel of the ancient Lake Maumee exposed during the widening of Woodard Avenue in 1925 – 1930. (See Ref. b below.)
9. **Bloomfield Estates Subdivision** – 1914 – This large 350 acre subdivision was one of the first of a dozen or more, developed by the Judson Bradway Company in the Bloomfield area between 1914 and 1930. Prior to being platted by Bradway the land was owned by the Walker – Gordon Farm and Laboratory Company (1909 – 1914). Before that it was the substantial James R. Cooper farm (186X – 1909). (See Ref. c below.) When Bradway filed his 1914 plat for Bloomfield Estates, he gave the roads typical English names. Two old roads from the early 1800s already ran through his new subdivision: The “Angling Road” running from southwest to northeast and “Ball Line Road” running from southeast to northwest. He renamed these Charing Cross Road and Kensington Road, respectively.
10. **5044 Charing Cross Road** – This house with its several out-buildings is located on the northeast corner of Charing Cross and WoodwaRoad It shows up clearly in 1915 birds-eye view painting commissioned by developer Judson Bradway of his new residential development. I have been unable to confirm the date that this house was build. It may have been part of either the Cooper Farm or the Walker – Gordon Farm & Laboratory operation. See Ref. f below which mentions two houses on the Cooper Farm in 1898. The 1896 Map of Bloomfield Township shows these two houses both on Charing Cross, one very close to Woodward Avenue which I believe to be 5044.

11. **Mastodon Pond** – 1934 – The pond on the right at Brookdale Boulevard is probably a “kettle lake” formed by the last receding glacial activity. On the 1915 plat map this pond is labeled “Bloomfield Lake”. It is not called that today, however. In 1934 the bones of a young mastodon were discovered by a CWA (Civil Works Administration) crew dredging the pond near the southwest bank. After being examined by the Cranbrook Institute of Science, the bones were sent to the Museum of Paleontology at the University of Michigan where they were displayed for many years as the *Bloomfield Mastodon*, affectionately known as “Bloomfield Charlie”. (See Ref. a below.)

On a related note the peat and rich organic soil removed during the dredging of the pond was sold to the Bloomfield Hills Country Club for golf course maintenance. (See Ref. c below.)

Mineral Water Bottling Plant – Many years ago an attempt was made to produce bottled mineral water immediately across Charing Cross Road from the Pond. A small bottling plant was built but it soon failed. (See Reference c and f below.)
12. **Grand Trunk Railroad overpass** – 1930 (see the year in the concrete base) – This is one of eighteen grade separations constructed between 1925 and 1930 when a 9.3 mile stretch of the Grand Trunk Railroad R.O.W. was relocated about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile east of its original mid-19th century position along the east edge of Woodward Avenue. The relocation was necessary to support the widening of Woodward Avenue. The section relocated extended from downtown Royal Oak to Long Lake Road.
13. **Commuter Station and Parking** – 1930 thru 1980 – On the southwest corner of the intersection of Charing Cross and the Railroad are the remains of one of four commuter stations that were constructed as part of the 1930 railroad relocation project. The steps, ramp, and platform are clearly visible from the parking area. Less visible, but still there, are the remains of the passenger tunnel under the tracks that allowed passenger for the northbound side to access the parking area. The parking area is slightly over 2 acres in size. The property was purchased recently (8 July 2008) by Detroit Edison Company. Today this is an access point for railroad and cell phone tower service vehicles. (*The other three commuter stations were located at: Long Lake Road, 14 Mile Road, and 12 Mile Road*) Commuter service on this section of the GTWRR ceased about 1980.
14. **Kensington Road** (Ball Line Road) – 1818 – The stretch of road from Big Beaver to Hickory Grove Road is presently known as Kensington Road. However, from 1818 until about 1930, it was called Ball Line Road after Horatio Ball who originally surveyed by in 1818. It was originally constructed to be an alternative road between Detroit and Pontiac to replace the Saginaw Trail (Woodward Avenue), which was at the time a very rough route. But the Saginaw Trail survived after all. The name Kensington Road appears on the 1916 McAlpine map of Bloomfield Township where it runs through the Bloomfield Estates subdivision (*see No. 9 above*). On the same map this road north of Wattles Road is still named Ball Line Road. Eventually the entire road from Big Beaver to Hickory Grove became known as Kensington Road.
15. **Fairbanks’ Corners** – 182X thru 183X – Old histories of Oakland County and Bloomfield Township describe an early village composed of several small

businesses that was located at the intersection of the newly surveyed Ball Line Road (1818) and a rough trail created by settlers coming into Bloomfield Township from the Clinton River area (Charing Cross Road). In the early 1830s there was a spirited competition between interested parties in both “Hamilton’s” (Birmingham) and Fairbanks’ Corners to be awarded the official post office for the area. It is clear who won out and was granted the post office.

16. **4620 Charing Cross Road** – on the northwest side (left) side of Charing Cross between Kensington Road and Wattles Road - This was one of the first half-dozen houses built in the Bloomfield Estates Subdivision. It was the home of P.E. Fuller, one of the first directors of the Bloomfield Estates Improvement Association. (See Ref. e below.)
17. **4525 Charing Cross Road** – on the southeast (right) side of Charing Cross – the 2nd house from the Wattle intersection - This was the home of reputed Detroit Mafia boss, **Peter Licavoli**, from 1940 thru 1961

Wattles Road (17 Mile) Turn left (west) for short distance to connect with Squirrel Road

18. **Wattles Road and Squirrel Road** - Note that on the Bloomfield Township map of 1857 Wattles Road was just an extension of Charing Cross to the east. (It did not continue west to Kensington Road) Squirrel Road extended a few hundred yards south of present day Wattles and intersected directly with Ball Line Road (Kensington) just north of Charing Cross.
19. **Cottage Hill** – The 60 acres at the northwest corner of Wattles and Squirrel Roads was the home of Fidelia (Woolley) Gillett. She was the daughter of Universalist minister Rev. Edward Woolley who for six years lived near Gilbert Lake and Telegraph and served the area from 1847 until his death in 1853. In 1855 Fidelia published, *Memoir of Rev. Edward Mott Woolley*, an extensive biography of her Universalist minister father, including a detailed description of the life in the Bloomfield – Pontiac area in the mid 19th century. Fidelia identified her location at the time of the writing as “Cottage Hill, Birmingham, Michigan”.
20. **Academy of the Sacred Heart** (on the west) – This convent and school was founded in Detroit in 1851 and moved to this 40 acre location in 1958 previously owned by the Briggs Development Corp.; which sold it to E.R. Breach in 1952; who in turn donated it to the Crestwood Charitable Foundation (CCF) in 1956; and the CCF donated the property to the Convent and Academy of the Sacred Heart in 1957. (See Tract Index for SW ¼ Section 13 at Register of Deeds office.)
21. **N. Bradley Higby Estate** (on the east side of Squirrel Road across from the back entrance for Sacred Heart) 1930s – Garage, 411 Steeple Chase; House, 448 Hunt Master. This was one of many such “Country Homes / Estates” built in the Bloomfield area in the prosperous 1920s.
22. **Walbri Road** (on the west) – 1920s estate of Detroit industrialist **Walter O. Briggs**, as in Briggs Stadium. The estate house and most of the original out buildings are still standing today as private residences. The 107 acre Briggs

Estate (Walbri) extended on the west side of Squirrel Road from the Sacred Heart Academy property to slightly north of present day Long lake Road

Long Lake Road (18 Mile)

23. **Long Lake Road** – This portion of Long Lake Road from Adams Road to Eastways (formerly Bloomfield Center Road) was not constructed until 1927, probably due to the marshy nature of the land that lay in its way. The road, when built, curved to the north to avoid the worst of the wetlands.
24. **Otto Kern Estate** (on the west side of Squirrel Road just to the north of Walbri) – Presently the street Hidden Pines Road Otto Kern was a contemporary of Walter Briggs and developed his estate in the 1920s and 30s. Mr. Kern named his estate, *West View*, after the short old road of the same name that then ran only between Adams and Squirrel Roads. (Or perhaps West View was named after the Kern Estate.) The Kern family operated the Kern's Department Store in Detroit for many years. All of the Kern buildings were demolished almost overnight in 1976 to make way for the Hidden Pines subdivision.
25. **Westview Road** (18 ½ Mile) – an early Township half-section road. It is visible on the map of 1857 but ran only ¾ of a mile between Adams Road and Squirrel Road. Some time after 1935 it was later extended to the west to Eastways then eventually to Kensington Road.
26. **2700 Squirrel Road** (on the west side across from Lenox Road.) The small lake on this property is considered by some as a **source** of the main branch of the Rouge River. Water from this spring-fed pond flows under Squirrel Road and Square Lake Road and through the Bowers School Farm. It continues in a north east direction into Troy and Lake Charnwood. It continues on through Firefighters Park before turning south and then west. It returns to Bloomfield Township when it crosses Adams Road just south of Wattles. It then passes through Springdale Golf Course at Big Beaver and Kensington and runs on into Birmingham.
27. Traveling “along the east side of the melt water escape channel associated with the **Inner Defiance moraine**.” (See Ref. b below)
28. Extremely large “**kettle hole**” on the Bowers School Farm in north east corner of the intersection of Squirrel Road and Square Lake Road (See Ref. b below.)

Square Lake Road (19 Mile)

29. **Charles L. Bowers School Farm** (on right) – The first portion of this 85 acre working farm was purchase in 1967 by the Bloomfield Hills School District and still operated by the school district today.
30. **2175 Squirrel Road** (on the east side of road 2nd house south of I-75) This was the Dowling Family farmhouse, originally located on Square Lake Road on what is now the Bowers School Farm. It was moved to its present location about 1950

31. **I-75** Constructed in this stretch in 1963 - 1965

32. **1141 Foxwood Ct.** (on east side of Squirrel on the northeast corner) The "Charles Torrey House" is a well-preserved mid-19th century Greek Revival farmhouse

South Boulevard (20 Mile)

Note: this is the boundary between Bloomfield Township to the South and Pontiac Township to the North

33. **Clinton River (Bike) Trail** – Just south of Auburn Road. Formerly the Michigan Airline Railroad R.O.W. from Jackson to Richmond built in the late 19th century. This abandoned R.O.W. is now an excellent biking and hiking trail that connects with several other such trails near Rochester.

References:

- a) *The Bloomfield Hills Mastodon*, by E. C. Case and George M. Stanley, University of Michigan, Cranbrook Institute of Science (CSI) Bulletin No. 4, October 1935.
- b) *Geological Excursion in the Cranbrook Area*, by George M. Stanley, University of Michigan, Cranbrook Institute of Science Bulletin 6 - Supplement, December 1936
- c) *A Brief History of Our Community* (Bloomfield Estates), from an oral recollection told by (long-time resident) Mr. John King – December 1992.
- d) *Charing Cross entrance posts add distinction*, by Kenn Jones, Oakland Press, February 5, 1989
- e) *Beautiful Bloomfield Estates*, Promotional Brochure produced by the Bloomfield Estates Improvement Association, ca 1925.
- f) *Birmingham, Mich – Its Past, Present and Future*, published in 1898. A copy can be found in the Allen Room at Baldwin Library in Birmingham.