



Grace Wilfong

More than pickles were packed in the Pickle Castor

A note without a signature left inside the jar for more than a century unlocks a story of immigration, pioneer spirit, family life, community and patriotism. The story adds to our understanding of Bloomfield's past.

The note begins: *"History, blue and silver pickle jar. Belonged to Lowes family, Birmingham, Michigan."*

Grace Wilfong recently shared the note from her inherited pickle castor. She is president of the Northville Genealogy Society and knew we would appreciate it.

The Lowes name was immediately interesting. James D. Benjamin, whose family owned the Benjamin-Barton House, had a daughter Augusta who married a Lowes. The list of Bloomfield soldiers honored on the Civil War monument in Shain Park includes two Lowes. What was the story of the Lowes family? We began to discover the connections.

William Lowes (born 1805) and John (born 1817) emigrated from England to Canada. There, William married Margaret who was born in Scotland and started a family. Sometime before 1840, William and Margaret with their children John, Isabelle, Mary, Elizabeth and Ann – along with the younger John Lowes – made their way to Oakland County, perhaps drawn by "Michigan Fever".

William and John were most likely brothers, although establishing that definitively will take some more research. It appears that John lived and worked on his brother's farm when they first arrived here. John then married a neighbor, Jerusha Valentine, in 1840 and acquired a farm of his own. The brothers prospered and their families continued to grow.

The Lowes were considered early settlers and opening a farm in Michigan in the mid-1800s had its own special challenges. Having a large family meant having many hands to help meet those challenges.

(Continued on page 3)

From the Board...

If you're really into local History with a capital "H" here's an opportunity for you.

The Society has a new committee that is working with the Library to expand upon the Local History Archives while making it and other materials more accessible to researchers. Information can be gathered to document farms, schools, mills, families – the areas to be explored are wide open and easy to match to your interests. Things you'll learn about might include: the proper way to handle materials, how to prepare descriptive content lists, how to assist patrons who want to learn about area history and, if you're technically inclined, how to scan documents and include them in an ever-growing digital collection.

We've gotten a start identifying Bloomfield's houses that are more than 75 years old. Each has a story ready to be told.

For more information email info@bloomfieldhistoricalsociety.org or Marty McGee, the Library's volunteer coordinator: mcgeemar@btpl.org.

Time to Renew Your Membership... or Join Us!

INSIDE

[info@... answers](mailto:info@...)

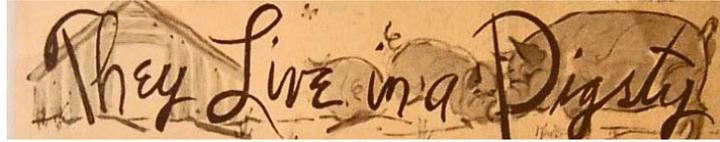
Who lived in this white cottage before the Kemps?



Hint: they said OINK!

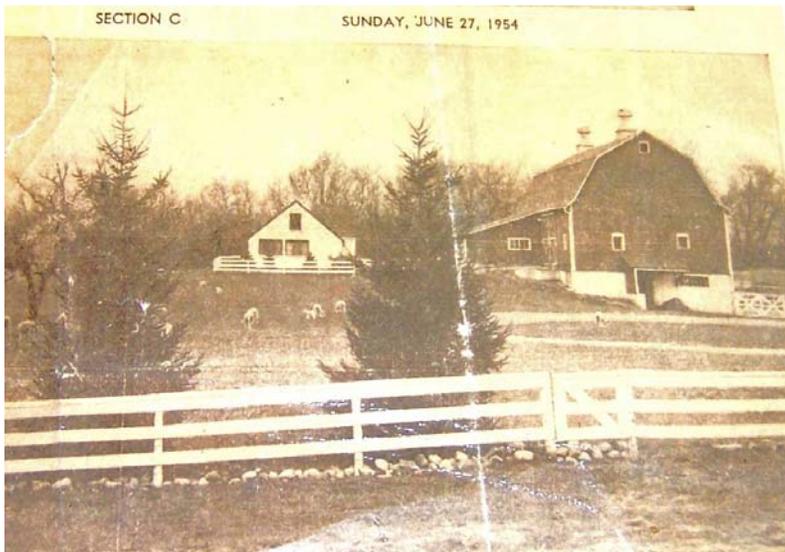
info@ answers

Society Member John Marshall tackles questions you ask.



A question from Eleanor Engelhart at Preservation Bloomfield's Corn Roast last August led to some interesting discoveries. According to local lore the quaint white brick building in back of the Barton House had once been a pigsty. Eleanor asked what we knew of the Kemp family who had lived there, as her son had gone to school with one of the children.

Who were the Kemps, and how did they come to live in a pigsty?



Sydney's Cottage (and lambs) in the 1954 *Detroit Free Press* Women's Section

The first page of a framed article from the Detroit Free Press that's hanging in the Bowers Academy gave us our first clue. Finding the second page required a trip to the archives of the Detroit Public Library.

In the 1940s William E. Dowling, a prominent Detroit attorney and onetime member of the U.S. Tariff Commission under Eisenhower, his wife Sydney and Sydney's two sons from her first marriage, James and Ward Kemp, were living on a 40 acre farm, near Oxford. It was a long commute for Dowling to his law practice in Detroit so, in 1948, the Dowlings looked for something closer to the city.

They found a farm that was only two miles from the rail commuter station on Kensington Rd. at Long Lake across from the Hunt Club. The farm they bought (now part of the Bloomfield Hills Schools' Farm) included a white farmhouse right on Square Lake Rd, a frame pigsty and a large red barn. The Dowlings called their new place, *Ups and Downs*.

As Sydney began planning for their new home she noticed how much nicer the view was from the Pigsty – the way the hill fell away toward the orchard and stream in the back. The white farmhouse, on the other hand, seemed to be in the way. Quickly the Dowlings decided to move the farmhouse to the northwest corner of their new farm and convert the pigsty into their home.

Out came the concrete feeding trough under the wide windows and the large rendering kettles, vestiges of an earlier time. The Dowlings added a fireplace and changed the chicken loft into a bedroom. Old whitewashed brick covered the frame siding; slate covered the cement floor. Like pioneers of old they wasted nothing, reusing the beams and boards of the old carriage shed to add a note of charm to the ceiling.

But things changed. Sydney's son Jim Kemp, wife Phoebe, and their four children moved into the pigsty-house, while the Dowlings instead adopted the farmhouse they had moved. It is these Kemps that Eleanor Engelhart remembered as having gone to school with her children.

Today the Farm's spring lambs are carefully tended, just as Sydney Dowling "hovered over each new crop of lambs" born in the barn and took joy watching them in the fenced pasture adjacent to her grandchildren's play-yard in the front.



Do you have a question about Bloomfield's past? Send us a note:
info@bloomfieldhistoricalsociety.org

Organic Produce Was All There Was in Early Bloomfield

In the 1853 issue of *The Michigan Farmer*, the local correspondent, commented on a Bloomfield farm:

“We called at the residence of Mr. John Chamberlain... to take a bird’s eye view of his fruit-yard, which is quite extensive. We were shown some of the finest specimens of Plums we have seen in our rambles. There were the Orleans, the Imperial Gage, Green Gage, Brown Prime, and several other varieties. The trees were groaning with their loads. Already he has sent to the Detroit market several small wagon-loads, and yet the stock seems ample to supply many more bushels.



We learned that for several years the pigs and turkies [sic] have been permitted to roam in the fruit-yard, and by them all the dropping plums have been eaten. The consequence is, the curculio* has been scarce and plums plenty.... He has a large farm, under good cultivation; and Bloomfield, like so many towns in Oakland County, can produce many such farms. We were presented with a good supply of the Orleans and Gage plums, and while writing this our better half is preparing them for dessert.”

*The curculio is a small long-snouted beetle that lays its eggs in immature fruit. The eggs hatch into larvae which then bore back out of the mature fruit which has fallen to the ground, where they can remain for a year or more before becoming adults – unless eaten by pigs and “turkies”.



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◆ (Pickles Continued from page 1) ◆

When tragedy struck, one can only imagine the toll it took on a family who had migrated from England and Scotland to Canada to the United States, looking for a better life. In 1846 William and Margaret, who had lost an infant son soon after their arrival in Michigan, lost their first-born son John at the age of 19. Then three years later their twin sons Robert and Peter also died.

Within the next year William and Margaret had another son they named Peter, followed closely by John and Jerusha who had a son they named Robert. For awhile, things must have seemed brighter.

The 1860 census shows William and family still on the farm in Troy, with John’s family nearby in Bloomfield. Shortly after that it appears William, who was well into his 50s, moved into “town” (Birmingham), buying a triangle of land at Mill and Saginaw (now Maple and Old Woodward.) There, spinster daughters Isabelle and Mary opened a dry goods and millinery shop.

In 1861 the Civil War began. Cousins Peter and Robert enlisted in Company D of Michigan’s 22nd Infantry within days of each other, stating they were 18 and from Bloomfield. On the second day of the battle of Chickamauga, in September, 1863 Peter, William’s son, was killed and his cousin Robert was taken captive the same day – only to die in June, 1864 at the notorious Andersonville prison in Georgia. While he is buried there in grave 1771, he also has a tombstone that shares his family plot in a Troy cemetery.

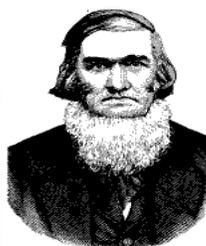
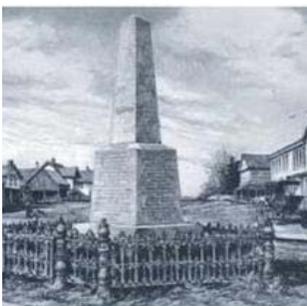
When the news reached Bloomfield, the shock to the Lowes families must have been profound.

The note in the pickle jar continues the story, complete with some of the inaccuracies incurred with time: “When two sons died in Andersonville Prison their sister Belle Lowes and their Mother were to [sic] disturbed to live in B’ham and moved immediately to Albuquerque, New Mexico where the Mother died & Belle lost her mind at an early age.” Years later, Dollie, the youngest child, recalled “the frantic packing and moving from Birmingham, taking very little with them.”

In 1904, Dollie, the last surviving child of William and Margaret, returned to Birmingham to settle the estate and “dispose of everything.” The writer of the note (still unknown) “loved the hoop skirts and bonnets” from the millinery shop, as well as the old horsehair cloth walnut furniture. “It was tragic taking those things out after so many years in storage. Dollie gave me the blue pickle castor, the hands I think fascinated me.”

John and Jerusha remained in Bloomfield. Not far from their farm in Section 13 was the farm of James Benjamin. In 1875 Benjamin’s daughter Augusta married Miles Lowes, the younger brother of Robert. Augusta was so proud of her new married name that she inscribed it forever in a pane of an upstairs window of her home that we now call the Benjamin-Barton House.

Pam Carmichael



WILLIAM LOWES.



MRS. MARGARET LOWES



Bloomfield Historical Society

The Bloomfield Historical Society is dedicated to fostering an appreciation of the rich history of the Bloomfield area by identifying, promoting and conserving our heritage. We encourage research to educate and engage all generations.

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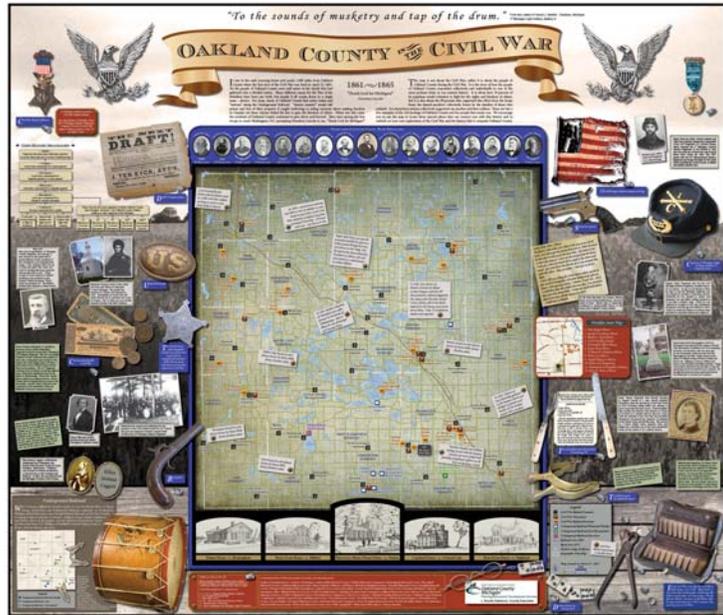
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YOU CAN BUY THIS MAP

Packed with information, this poster-sized map commemorates Oakland County's participation in the Civil War. It was prepared by the County's Planning and Economic Development Services department (and is one in a series that includes Native American trails and other infographics).

Each detailed and brightly-colored map is perfect for a family room wall or perhaps to present to your favorite child's teacher for the classroom.

The Society benefits from each map we sell. The cost is \$20 and you can order one by sending an email to info@bloomfieldhistoricalsociety.org.

The Board and Friends of Preservation Bloomfield
Cordially invite you to an evening of celebration



Friday, May 11
at the Townsend Hotel
6:30pm to 10:30pm
Benefiting the Barton Farmhouse Restoration

For ticket information call Pam Budde: 248.642.7806

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