Bloomfield Hills City Hall  
(part 1)

A few times a day I pass by Bloomfield Hills City Hall, located near the corner of Woodward and Long Lake, and occasionally I find myself wondering about its past. This characterful building was constructed in 1926 as the Bloomfield Township garage six years before Bloomfield Hills became a City. It remained in use by the Township until 1938.

Done in an English style to give the impression of staidness, the garage was defined by an exterior of brick and stone, with a sloping slate roof of variegated color, touched off with bronze fittings, bronze lamps and bronze hinges on the two large doors. A large bronze weather vane weighing more than 186 pounds and measuring more than five feet across was also installed. It was to be the first unit of a proposed group of three similar buildings at Bloomfield Center, at what was the heart of the Village of Bloomfield Hills. The other two buildings were to be a complete community house/office building and a fire hall.

At the same time construction of the garage ensued, just south of this location, construction of the venerable Fox and Hounds was also nearing completion. Although it was originally intended to be used by the Township entirely for the storage and repair of its trucks and other road equipment (specifically: “four trucks, one tractor, and three graders”), the Township garage was designed by Detroit architect Robert J. MacDonald to give visitors the impression of being something used for the executive offices of a civic corporation. Its appearance was described as one of “aristocratic splendor” and considered “one of the finest of its kind in the state and fitting for the beautiful surroundings of Bloomfield Hills.”

On either side of the storage area there were offices, and on the west side of the building there were living quarters (a living room, dining room, kitchen, plus two large bedrooms on the second floor) for the on-site caretaker. Each room in the building was separated by large fireproof doors.

Built by Chissus Brothers, construction began in November 1926 and it was completed in just 60 days at a cost of $26,000.

Katie Kiyo

(Part 2: What Happened to the Township Offices is on Page 3)
Who Moved the Tracks?

Society Member John Marshall tackles questions you ask.

Background: From 1839 through the 1920s a rail line had played an important role in the Bloomfield area. But, by the early 1900s, automobiles had become so popular that the roadways became very congested. In 1921 local business leaders and property developers formed The Wider Woodward Organization. They began pressuring the State to invest in widening Woodward from a 60 ft. right-of-way (R.O.W.) to something much grander. Finally, in 1923 the state legislature passed the Wider Woodward Bill calling for a 200 ft. roadway with four traffic lanes in each direction from the Detroit city limits to downtown Pontiac. While this required demolishing some buildings, the greatest impediment to the completion of the project, however, was the existence of the nine mile stretch of what had become the Grand Trunk RR on the east side of Woodward from just north of Eleven Mile Rd. in Royal Oak to just north of Quarton Road in Bloomfield Township. Only a couple of miles of this lay within the boundaries of the Township (Lincoln Rd. to Quarton Rd).

In 1926 the State acquired a new section of R.O.W. a little less than a mile east of Woodward and exchanged it for the railroad R.O.W. along Woodward. The new route enters Bloomfield Township at Adams Road just South of Big Beaver and connects to the original R.O.W. at E. Long Lake and Kensington.

Land Acquisition The new R.O.W. cut through many platted subdivisions. In Bloomfield Township in particular it went through two major subdivisions. The Bloomfield Estates Subdivision north of Big Beaver Rd. yielded seven complete lots and parts of several more to the R.O.W. Existing roads were truncated by the new tracks and in essence Bloomfield Estates became two separate subdivisions. In addition a portion of the east side of Springdale Park was taken making the Golf Course a bit tighter.

The Trowbridge Farms Subdivision experienced similar disruption. Several lots were lost and roads were reconfigured. Trowbridge Road was connected to Kensington over an elaborate new grade separation bridge with seven arches.

A number of individual and group land devaluation lawsuits resulted from the presumed impact of the railroad location and acquisition deals. These went on for many years. Most were not settled until 1932.

Features of the New R.O.W. - Many benefits came out of the relocation project in addition to Woodward being widened to its present size. Every road crossing in the 9.3 miles relocated was grade separated - that is the trains and the motor vehicles never were on the same level when they crossed. There were 18 grade-separated crossings in all. In all but two of the cases the cars and trucks went under the trains.

An elegant new Depot was constructed at Maple Rd. and Eton St. It is preserved today as Big Rock Chophouse.

Commuter service to and from Detroit was provided on the relocated Grand Trunk. It replaced the dying Detroit United Railway commuter service that had operated along Woodward Avenue since the 1890s. Several commuter platforms were constructed providing shelter and parking for the rail commuters. Two of these were in Bloomfield Township - one on the south side of Charing Cross Rd. (still visible today); the other on the west side of E. Long Lake Rd., across Kensington from the BOHC. These continued in use until October 1983 when commuter service to and from Detroit ceased.

The old railroad R.O.W. that had bypassed downtown Birmingham was converted into an automobile bypass named Hunter Blvd., recently renamed to Woodward Avenue.

(Continued on page 4)
When Bloomfield Township was formed as one of two townships in all of Oakland County back in 1827 its governing Board didn’t have much of a problem finding someplace to meet – either in someone’s log home or at Bagley’s Inn. By the 1920s, however, Township government was operating out of two offices in Birmingham, one above a bank, the other in the crowded municipal building.

In November of ’26 the Township built what was originally to be a road maintenance garage near the intersection of Woodward and Long Lake Road on property they had acquired in Feb. for $15,000. Road maintenance was a big deal when there were few paved roads in the area and the rest were either graveled or just plain dirt. Soon a fire department was shoehorned into the new garage and, not long afterwards, the Township offices moved out of Birmingham and into the garage. As a precursor to today’s increased call for shared services, the Township shared fire protection and road maintenance with the villages of Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills. That road maintenance necessitated owning a gravel pit.

In ’32 Bloomfield Hills became a city, followed by Birmingham on Valentine’s Day of ’33. That left much of the previously shared assets such as that gravel pit, the Township garage/fire department/office and financial matters such as uncollected taxes (this was the Depression after all) in limbo.

An advisory board with members from each municipality was created to deal with the problem in 1934. It devised a formula based on the property valuation for each unit that resulted in Birmingham getting a 43.96 percent share of joint resources, Bloomfield Township 40.62 percent and the City of Bloomfield Hills just 16.42 percent.

The horse trading that resulted from applying the percentages, among other things, left the Hills with the Township garage (its appraised value of $28,000 was applied to the City’s overall share), Birmingham with Springdale Park ($75,000) and the Township with that gravel pit ($45,000) and the need for new facilities. The Township was advised by its own counsel to sell the gravel pit for whatever it could get.

By March of 1938 Supervisor Perry Vaughan was charged with seeking a new home for the Township. Col. Edwin George, a Township resident, then donated five acres on Telegraph, south of Long Lake Road for the construction of a new building to be designed by J. Robert F. Swanson. Nearly half of the $23,000 project cost would come from a grant from the U.S. Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. It forms the core of the present Township campus.

In 1926 – 2013
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Born in Hungary, Korab made quite a fashion statement in Bloomfield Hills with his “fur-trimmed coat, homburg and Van-dyke beard” when he arrived in 1955 to work with Eero Saarinen at his design studio on Long Lake near Woodward. He broke new ground with his photographs - and the ways in which he enhanced the final images, sometimes printing and reprinting to ensure that the photographic texture faithfully mirrored that of his subjects. Korab lived off Long Lake, just east of Bloomfield, on an early farm property. It included a century-old barn which he repurposed as his studio.

Realtor Marjorie Schultz asked Bloomfield Historical to join a group working to preserve Korab’s studio and gardens. A local family has now purchased his three-acre homestead and will be doing just that.

Korab wandered Bloomfield and the Cranbrook campus as his extended back garden. His images amassed over the years capture and enrich the story of our community. Many of them are in Bloomfield Blossoms, copies of which are available from the Society.

Korab’s philosophy was simply stated: “I am an architect with a passion for nature’s lessons and man’s interventions.” His collected works are now in the Library of Congress.

For more on Korab hear John Comazzi, author of Balthazar Korab Architect of Photography at the Bloomfield Township Public Library on April 27.
**Grand Plans for Rapid Transit** - The *Birmingham Eccentric* published “Extra” editions in January and September, 1929 which detailed plans for a greatly expanded electrically-powered rapid transit commuter system to operate between Pontiac and Detroit over the relocated R.O.W.

Four parallel tracks would be installed on the R.O.W. – two for freight and two for passenger service.

A four-lane Automobile Speedway would be constructed over the tracks. The two inner lanes for express traffic and the two outer lanes for local traffic. The roadway would be supported by the structures that carried the electric wires for the train engines. Travel time from Birmingham to Detroit by train was expected to be 30 minutes and 25 minutes by auto speedway.

Completion was expected in 1931 but the Depression intervened.

[Editor’s Note: A more extensive version of John’s article is on the Society website.]

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**DAR honors Historic Wing Lake Schoolhouse**

The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution recently presented a national Historic Preservation Recognition Award that notes the importance of the work undertaken to preserve the Schoolhouse.

As Barbara Balow, Regent of the Piety Hill Chapter of the DAR pointed out, there was “concern that this structure needed to be preserved as part of the pioneer history of Bloomfield... to illustrate what schools were like for the children of pioneers of this area.”

Bloomfield Historical President Pam Carmichael accepted the award.

The Schoolhouse itself will be honored later this year by the Piety Hill Chapter with a DAR plaque certifying its historic status.

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**Do you know Boo-Boo and Suzette?**

We’d like to get to know them better – particularly why they are pictured on this ’30s-era postcard of the Kingsley Inn.

If you know their story we’d love to hear it. Drop us a line at the email address below.

Thanks!