

Editor's Notes

You may remember that we've been asking you for some family stories.

All we had to do for the toll road story was ask Pam Carmichael if she remembered attorney John Poole talking about it with neighbors at her parents' Wing Lake home in the 1950s. "There were some pretty heated conversations over cocktails," she recalls and she remembers her much younger self wondering what all the fuss was about. Now she knows.

New member Charles Barker queried "info@" if Eleanor Roosevelt ever visited the home on Charing Cross that his family has owned since 1958. That took us on an interesting journey that was especially appropriate this presidential election season.

We even discovered that Dot Roosevelt's grandmother was married to the first Ralph L Polk—but that's another story.

Longtime Foxcrofter and Society member Jane Barton started us on the toll road story.

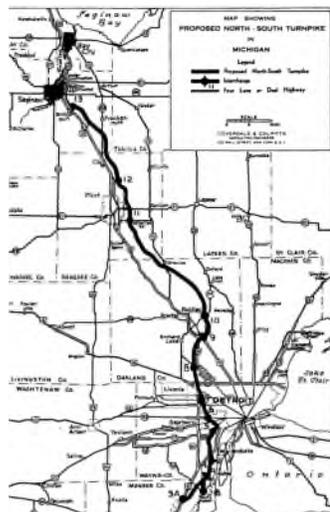
How about you? Tilt at any windmills? Curious about something in Bloomfield's past? Let us know and we'll try to find the answer.

Not in our front yards!



leads the fight against a turnpike in 1955

Automobile traffic soared in the late '40s and early '50s as cars once again came off assembly lines that had been building tanks, olive-drab trucks and B-24s in Detroit, the Arsenal of Democracy. Road building, unfortunately, had not really kept pace since the 1930s. The Interstate System was still to begin during the Eisenhower administration and states were left to fend for themselves.



Proposed turnpike

Toll roads were one solution to moving all those cars from one place to another. And, while toll roads in Southeast Michigan were nothing new – Bloomfield had had them in the early 1800s – one in particular was being planned that would raise the ire of residents along its route from Monroe County to Saginaw.

The Michigan Turnpike Authority was signed into being in June, 1953 by Governor G. Mennen Williams. Its charge was to design toll roads that would make Detroit more accessible by car and not cost the state money. While a route from Detroit to Chicago was shelved, the one from Monroe to Saginaw was put on the front burner by the Authority.

By 1955 the plans that would essentially replace Telegraph with the toll road were finalized and "turnpike men were showing aerial blueprints of the proposed route" according to *The Eccentric*.

(Turnpike Continued on page 3)

Apple Tower

My husband and I began our house-hunting in Bloomfield Hills before real estate listings were available online. That meant that instead of searching the Net from the comforts of home, we drove up and down every street on weekends, looking for a house that had that special "Je ne sais quoi." Then one day we found it! Sadly, it was not for sale...but I never forgot that lovely French-inspired home.

"Apple Tower," was built for Clarence E. and Phoebe Magee Otter in 1929. The name grew out of the beautiful



setting they chose in the middle of a once-thriving 14 acre apple orchard.

Orchards were common in our area back then, and the Otter's part of the orchard along Woodward in Bloomfield Hills had been owned by Mrs. R. L. Robertson.

(Apple Tower Continued on page 4)

“Why was Eleanor Roosevelt a frequent visitor to Bloomfield?”

Eleanor Roosevelt was a woman of many interests but her family always came first. Her sister-in-law, Dorothy Kemp Roosevelt lived in Bloomfield and Birmingham from 1935 until her death in 1985. Eleanor often visited Dorothy and her daughters.

“Dot”, as she was known, was married to G. Hall Roosevelt, Eleanor’s younger brother. They rented a home in Bloomfield from 1935-41 from the Bradway Company at 4805 Charing Cross Road. Dorothy was Hall’s second wife and mother of their children, Amy, Diana and Janet (born in 1930). Hall and Dorothy were divorced in 1937. He moved to Eleanor’s estate in New York and Dorothy and the girls remained in the house.

The house, a charming English Tudor, was built in 1917 and designed by Marcus Burrowes who was the architect of the Greek Theatre at Cranbrook. It was one of the first in Judson Bradway’s Bloomfield Estates subdivision and sat on eight acres of rolling countryside.

Later, in 1958 Dr. Charles Barker and his wife Nancy purchased the house which their family still own. Last year their son Charles decided to do some research on the house and wanted to know if Eleanor Roosevelt had visited her relatives while they lived in the house.

Others had heard that Janet, one of Dorothy’s daughters, had actually sold time on a stepstool outside the house to her young friends so that they could peek in the window to see the First Lady inside.



4805 Charing Cross Road

Charles reached out to Janet, who is living in California, and was delighted when she got back to him with her memories of her time in the Bloomfield area. Janet lived in the home from the time she was five until she was 11 in 1941, the year her father died and her family moved to Waddington Road in Bloomfield Village.

Dorothy and her daughters maintained a close relationship with both Franklin and Eleanor. Eleanor, in her November 14, 1940 nationally syndicated column *My Day*, related a Bloomfield story:



“At a little after 1:00 o'clock I was back at the Statler hotel in Detroit and my niece and namesake, Eleanor Roosevelt [Hall’s daughter from his first marriage], came in with a friend to lunch with me. The two girls told me they had done much campaigning [for Franklin’s third term]. Young Eleanor added that she had enjoyed it, but had few allies in and about the Bloomfield Hills section, where the Cranbrook School is located.

After lunch, “we drove out to Cranbrook and I very hurriedly obtained an impression of this most beautiful school. The glimpse of the courtyard, as you enter the girls' school where Milles' statue of Diana stands poised on her pedestal, is something not to be forgotten. In fact, these fortunate youngsters are surrounded by beauty of nature, architecture and art on every side.

“I dined with Mrs. Dorothy Kemp Roosevelt and my three other nieces. Then I lectured in the evening at the Cranbrook School and took the night train back to Chicago.”



Dorothy was a concert pianist and an active Democrat – she filed to run for the U. S. House in July, 1942 and became the first woman in Michigan history to win a primary. She lost in November in her largely Republican district.

Daughter Janet was an active teenager – reported skating at Wing Lake in December of '43 and less than a year later getting a surprise package from fellow Baldwin High School classmates with presents to open each day as she recuperated from an accident in the gym.

For a short time the family lived on Dorchester in Birmingham. When Eleanor visited, the Secret Service closed surrounding streets. According to a subdivision history, a later owner of the house was so impressed that when she gave a party, she wrote with lipstick on the toilet seat cover, “*Eleanor Roosevelt sat here.*”

Eleanor continued her visits to Dorothy’s new studio home on Greenwood. Designed by Ed Elliot, an associate of Eero Saarinen, the home had a recital area that would seat 75 and where she would give lessons on her two grand pianos. In her March 11, 1953 *My Day* column, Eleanor reported, “After breakfast Mr. Elliott took me to the studio. You might say that the building is constructed around two grand pianos, but they don't swamp the one big room. This studio struck me as a remarkable, compact and well-arranged little house for one person, with a sense of space and wonderful acoustics. Mrs. Dorothy Roosevelt and a friend of hers played some Bach for us which was beautifully and perfectly rendered.”

(Eleanor Continued on page 3)

(Turnpike Continued from page 1)

Michigan's highway commissioner, meanwhile, had other plans: a freeway instead of a tollway – except the freeway would cut through the Oakland Hills Country Club. Neither plan went down well with Bloomfield area residents.

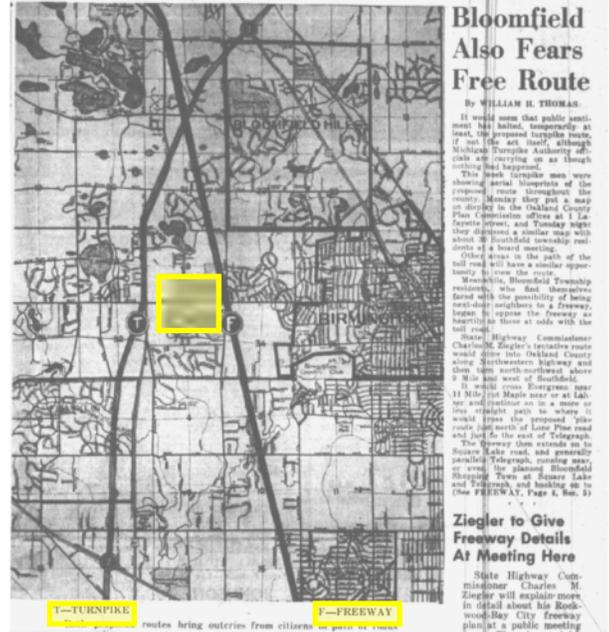
Residents of Foxcroft, a subdivision that would lose its community playground and be almost isolated by the toll road, banded together with some movers and shakers from nearby Wing Lake, like attorney John B. Poole. A young State Representative named Dick VanDusen joined the Vanderkloots from up Telegraph and then-State Senator William Broomfield to fight what seemed like a hopeless battle. According to a narrative provided by Foxcroft resident Jane Barton, "The Authority was quite arrogant... they had political and financial backing and our U.S. Congressman was apparently on their side. Anyone living a half-mile or more [from the route] was completely apathetic."

"Broomfield," the narrative continues, "introduced a bill in the State Senate to abolish the Turnpike Authority."

There was a public hearing on the bill very early on the morning of April 20, 1955 and "A large contingent of Foxcrofters hired buses (2) to attend the hearing in Lansing." Thanks to a former Foxcroft resident who was in management on GM's public relations staff, a professional photographer traveled with the group. The resulting photos appeared in *The Detroit News* and *The Eccentric* "so we had favorable publicity." Poole pointed out to Senators that "The proposed toll road between Detroit and Saginaw can be operated profitably only at the expense of our most prosperous urban communities and is therefore contrary to the public interest of a large segment of Michigan residents."

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, which created the Interstate system, the narrative boasted "along with Foxcroft's determined opposition (we like to believe) delayed and eventually abolished the Michigan Turnpike Authority."

Besides saving its playground, Foxcroft helped spur the creation of Bloomfield's United Homeowners' Association. William Broomfield was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1956 and would serve the Bloomfield area until his retirement in 1993. mfc



Busloads stormed Lansing

Early Vote Requested On 'Pike

The proposed toll road between Detroit and Saginaw can be operated profitably only at the expense of our most prosperous urban communities and is therefore contrary to the public interest of a large segment of Michigan residents.

This statement was made by John B. Poole, Bloomfield Hills, in a speech before the Committee on Highways in the State Senate on April 20. Poole is legal counsel for the Citizens Protective Association of Michigan, Inc., a group opposing the turnpike plan.

Originally composed of residents of Pontiac, Franklin, Bloomfield Hills, Southfield and Bloomfield townships, the association now includes residents of Allen Park, Detroit and Dearborn, all communities lying in the path of the proposed turnpike.

Poole reminded the committee that the state legislature historically has always upheld the rights of local communities to a voice in the matter of road building and recognized the interdependence of urban planning and good road planning.

"How then can it be," Poole said, "that the legislature would authorize a Turnpike Authority to arbitrarily locate and construct a depressed or elevated toll road across and through populous areas most concerned with problems of urban development, without permission of the communities involved, and without apparent concern for the distribution of local municipal services and resultant damage to planned and zoned residential areas?"

Poole said his association urgently requested that Senator Broomfield introduce legislation to abolish the Turnpike Authority, S. 1117, under committee hearing, be submitted to the vote of the Senate at the earliest possible moment.



HAROLD A. ROSEBERRY REP. RICHARD VANDUSEN Local leaders discuss turnpike at hearing's close



JOHN B. POOLE J. H. WITH HELL

(Eleanor Continued from page 2)

So, while we can't confirm an Eleanor Roosevelt sighting at the Charing Cross home (an article in *The Eccentric* said the tickets-and-stepstool caper was real, but later and probably at the Waddington house in Bloomfield Village), we do know that she continued to make several visits to the area, one in particular in the 1950s, speaking at Birmingham's Town Hall lecture series where she was interviewed afterwards by journalist Shirley Eder for the innovative NBC-Radio program Monitor.

Contributors: John Marshall, Charles Barker, Michael Carmichael



Eleanor with Shirley Eder

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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(Apple Tower Continued from page 1)

Inspiration for the house came from a photo Clarence Otter carried back from France following his service in WWI. It depicted an 11th-century chateau in Domrémy, hometown of Joan of Arc in Lorraine.

The Otters chose architect H. Augustus

O'Dell, a close friend of the family. At that time, O'Dell had just completed Pine Knob Mansion for Sidney Waldon, a remarkable 19-room English Manor residence located in Clarkston, atop the highest point in southeast Michigan.

O'dell used the photo of the chateau as the basis for the estate's design with its irregular roof lines with graduated slates and finials, a turret, dormers, and dust porches. Its equally captivating interior featured inlaid mosaic terrazzo floors, carved marble fireplaces, and silver sconces.

The Otter family included three young daughters: Doris, Phoebe and Julie. According to middle daughter Phoebe, the windows in the kitchen had originally been set high "so servants wouldn't waste time looking out." Often the staff included a cook, a chauffeur and a nanny. And of course there was a "telephone room" which offered privacy for phone conversations, something we don't require today.

The circular staircase in the turret revealed the original family crest and a poem in French which translated to, "Little house/Comfortable for me/Not uncomfortable for anyone/Clean enough/And nevertheless bought with my own money."

It's ironic that the Bloomfield Hills home, Inch House, that my husband and I did ultimately purchase was also designed by H. Augustus O'Dell! To my knowledge, Apple Tower and Inch House are the only two homes that O'Dell designed in the City of Bloomfield Hills.

Katie Kiyō



In memory of

Robert E. (Bob) Hoisington

1935-2015

Bob was a longtime member of the Bloomfield Historical Society Board. He was an active member of our community, serving also on the boards of Bloomfield Hills Rotary, the Michigan Council on Economic Education, the Detroit Executive Service Corps, Patriot Week and his own neighborhood association. We will miss his wise counsel, his sense of humor and his smiling declaration at the end of our meetings that it had been yet "another stupendous meeting."