

# Legacy

Bloomfield  
Historical Society  
founded in 2004

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## Editor's Notes

Tally-HO!

In the Roaring 'Twenties in Bloomfield "riding to the hounds" was a popular activity amongst many of the local estate owners. The Tudor-styled Fox and Hounds Inn opened to enhance the experience – and went so far as to feature steak and kidney pie on the menu.

*Legacy* looked into the lore of the Fox and Hounds for our April Local History program.

By the slightly more egalitarian '50s, Inn staffers were playing in a local business softball league – and winning! At the end of one season a William Roberts picked up their championship trophy.



Birmingham Eccentric Sept. 21, 1950

Was this William Roberts related to current restaurateur Bill Roberts? We asked. "No relation," he replied – but let me look into it." Roberts asked his friend Bill Roberts if he might be the son of the baseball player. "This is a hoot!" the second (or by now third) Bill Roberts replied. Turns out his Dad, the ballplayer, was a ringer and was actually an insurance executive who, by the mid-'50s, had become the Mayor of Birmingham.



"Our" Bill Roberts owns the popular restaurant Bill's which is located in the building that replaced the fabled Fox and Hounds. Bill has done much to recreate the warm community atmosphere of the original – including several historic photos and articles supplied by the Bloomfield Historical Society. Curious connections.

This issue of *Legacy* is about connections – but also about loss. The Fox and Hounds and Manly Davis' home in his Oak Knob Farms subdivision are both gone – but their stories are still with us.

Once in a while our readers share information that helps us tell what life in the Bloomfield area was like beyond the fading ink in a newspaper article or the sometimes not-so-careful handwriting in an official document.

This time it was Sally Woodruff Ingold who offered stories of Overbrook, the Bloomfield home of her grandparents, the Frederick James Robinsons. While the home they lived in for years is also gone, memories of teas, neighborhood dinner parties and family gatherings keep us connected.

## Overbrook



Overbrook, the ten-acre estate of Nelly and Frederick J. Robinson, was a charming country idyll. Located just west of Woodward off Lone Pine Road, a pair of stone pillars (which still stand, by the way) marked the way up a winding drive. Here a bridge just wide enough for one car to cross over an active brook inspired the name and created a fitting entrance to what would be revealed next.

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INSIDE  
info@...

Manly Davis: the  
man who built  
The Fox &  
Hounds

## info@ answers

Society member John Marshall tackles questions you asked

In our upcoming program on the former Fox & Hounds we talk a bit about Manly Davis, its developer – but what else did he do besides create this iconic landmark?



Mr. Manly D. Davis

**FAMILY** Manly D. Davis was born in 1879 in Pontiac. He was a descendant of Cornelius Davis who came from New York State in 1836 to settle in Springfield Township a few miles northwest of Pontiac with his wife, five sons and two daughters. The Davis family founded the small town of Davisburg.

Davis attended the University of Michigan where he received his law degree. In 1905, after briefly practicing law, he purchased 70 acres at the southeast corner of W. Long Lake and Lahser Roads. Manly and Ella Poppleton were married in 1907. She was the daughter of Edgar C. Poppleton, whose farm on the north edge of the village of Birmingham was platted into a subdivision.

In 1912 Manly and Ella moved into their new house between Lahser and Vaughan Roads with 4 year old daughter, Mary Isabel. In 1917 the Davis' other daughter, Sarah (Sally) was born. At that time Davis acquired a second parcel of 150 acres in the northeast corner of Lone Pine and Lahser Roads adjacent to the first 70 acre parcel, giving him a total of 220 acres of contiguous property along the east side of Lahser Road.

**OAK KNOB FARMS** In 1917 Manly, with his sister Sarah, platted the Oak Knob Farms subdivision containing 48 large estate-sized building lots, connected by meandering roads. The Davis' 1912 house was in the middle of this subdivision. Manly was known as "a pioneer in building for sale in Bloomfield Hills, homes of a unique design. He paved the way by building these houses far away from Woodward Avenue and transportation, but in attractive locations." (*The Afterglow*, Oct. 1925)



The "Round-Up" Crowns a Hill Top

**THE ROUND UP** The Davis house in the Oak Knob Farm subdivision was their year-round home. Manly however went back to his roots in Davisburg to build a fishing and hunting lodge that became a weekend retreat for family and friends. He named it The Round Up. It was on a hilltop in the middle of 220 acres, approached by a mile-long drive. The "Spanish-style ranch house" (with a tower) was featured in the October 1925 issue of *The Afterglow*. He incorporated the historic mill-stone from the old Davis Mill as well as other features created by local artisans. The property today is a Springfield Township Park but the house was demolished in 2016.



A plat of Oak Knob Farms

**THE FOX & HOUNDS BUILDING** In the winter of 1926-1927 Manly spent a considerable amount of time in England. Upon return from England he collaborated with Bloomfield architect, J. Robert F. Swanson, to design his vision of a typical English Tudor Inn, but in a uniquely American way. [More on Tudor architecture in the Bloomfield area on page 4]

When it opened in November 1927, at the North end of the building were: a Standard Oil "oil station", The Inn, an antiques shop and a Ballroom up above. On the South end were additional stores and shops on the first floor, with charming apartments on the second floor

Manly and Ella, lived out their lives in the Bloomfield area. Manly died in 1950, while still residing in his Oak Knob Farms subdivision. Ella would live another 25 years.



The Fox and Hounds Inn Building at Bloomfield Center

(Continued from page 1)



*Sings of Spring at Overbrook in 1927*

Crowning a low hill, the beautiful white clapboard home welcomed family and a host of friends and neighbors. The house and grounds were the backdrop for the Robinsons, their three children and eventually 11 grandchildren to enjoy outdoor life as well as being with each other.

Building on the core of the original farmhouse, architect J. Robert F. Swanson had extended the house, designing wings sited to take in the view and the sun from every window. Inside, the unusually fine woodwork and paneling was a testament to Mr. Robinson's ability to acquire the finest materials through his business as a lumber dealer.

As one of the area's hobby farms, trendy in the '20s and '30s, the grounds provided the assets of farming life with little of the upkeep of a larger operation. Besides woods filled with native wildflowers there were planted flower and vegetable gardens. There was a cottage for the gardener who did most of the work, barns, coops and critters large and small – including horses, cows, chickens, ducks, turkeys and even a pair of peacocks.

Although Bloomfield was still a small community, many of its residents were Detroit's "movers and shakers". Their names are still familiar – whether on a street sign, a building or in the pages of our local history – but they were just friends and neighbors who would drop by each other's homes for a tennis match or a bridge game or join together for an event at "the Country Club."

Nelly, Grandmother Robinson, liked telling a story that captured the difference in Bloomfield life then as contrasted to today. Looking out from the house to the tennis court one clear, beautiful summer day she was startled to see the players suddenly fall from view. On closer inspection she found them lying on their backs in the grass gazing up into the blue sky to marvel at the novelty of an airplane passing overhead.



During WWI Robinson used the management skills he had honed in building his successful lumber company. As civilian Chief of the Detroit Ordnance District he managed \$271 million worth of contracts (more than \$5.6 billion today) to "attain maximum production of munitions in a minimum time." For this he was awarded, with the approval of President Wilson, one of the first Distinguished Service Medals by the U.S. Army.



*Editor's Note: A subsequent owner of Overbrook was the Cranbrook artist and faculty member Clifford B. West – who also painted a mural at The Fox & Hounds. More curious connections.*

## 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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## A Sign Marks the Spot

It's usually (and rightly) a Big Deal when something (or someone) turns 100 years old. This year, however, the Bloomfield area begins to mark events that occurred 200 years ago. A Really Big Deal!

We're not quite as old as Detroit (300 years and counting) but consider this - we're just 41 years younger than the USA itself!

Two hundred years ago our "Really Big Deal" happened when a U.S. government surveyor planted the stake that officially put us on the map.

On April 4, 2017, a group of folks interested in local history gathered at the Sylvan Lake Community Center to commemorate that event. Helen Jane Peters and our own John Marshall told the story of the locating of the "4 Corners" post by surveyor Joseph Wampler on April 4, 1817. "4 Corners" because he used one post to mark the intersection of Bloomfield, Waterford, Pontiac and West Bloomfield Townships. From that post the surveyors went on to mark the boundary lines that divided each township into 36 sections of 640 acres each, which would be further subdivided into quarters. Early settlers relied on the surveyors' information to legally describe the land they wished to purchase.



Bloomfield Township officials and Historical Society members gather by the Wayside sign

It was not that many years later that those early settlers would make an investment in their future and begin their new lives in Bloomfield Township.

Where once 200 years ago the "4 Corners" post was in a vast, previously uncharted landscape, the area now is a residential neighborhood near Telegraph and Orchard Lake Roads. A new Wayside sign will be placed this summer in a more publicly-accessible location nearby on Pontiac Drive.

## TUDOR ARCHITECTURE

By the early 1920s Bloomfield Center was a hotbed of "revival." Tudor Revival architecture, that is. The intersection of Long Lake Road and Woodward Avenue began to take on a distinctly Tudor style. William Barbour and Manly Davis built commercial developments, steeped in Tudor, across the street from each other.

Barbour's, which at one time housed the Bloomfield Hills village offices as well as retail shops and the early outline of the Kingsley Inn, resided on the west side.



On the East side, Manly Davis, with the successful Oak Knob subdivision under his belt, built The Fox & Hounds

Tudor Revival was actually a national trend among the well-to-do. They had recovered from the recession of the 1890's and in the Detroit area particularly - in Sherwood Forest, Boston-Edison and Indian Village, among other neighborhoods - Tudor was the way to show that you had arrived. It was only natural then for Bloomfield "summer" and Estate homes, such as George Booth's Cranbrook House and Edward Hammond's Hillwood, to exhibit "Tudor" styling.

