

“The Man who Built Bloomfield: Judson Bradway” by Wasey Rehman

Highly revered not only in metropolitan Detroit but also within pop culture with references to “Cranbrook” in rapper Eminem's hit songs, the city and surrounding areas of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, is one of a classic yet golden instance of the growth of an American suburb. Once a humble farming village over a hundred years prior in the outskirts of a booming industrial Detroit, the area that is now Bloomfield Township would be forged into history with the vision of a man named Judson Bradway (1882 –1965). It was this product of the Birmingham School system that fashioned the neighborhoods and suburban layout that is so fundamental to our Bloomfield community today.

Judson Bradway was born on July 27, 1882, to (mother) Mary and (father) Albert Bradway in Birmingham, MI. His early life was spent in the Birmingham schools and was influenced by the successful agriculturist that his father was (Burton et al.). The young man spent two years at the University of Michigan before beginning his career in the real estate business; a year after, he was admitted into the Detroit College of Law that rewarded him an LL. B. degree in 1906 (Burton et al.). His understanding of how to navigate the legal world would serve him well in his real estate career and contributed to the long-lasting impact Mr. Bradway would have as he served on local, state, and national real estate boards and advocated for the modern-day real estate licensing laws of the State of Michigan.

In the Spring 2015 edition of the Bloomfield Historical Society's *Legacy* newsletter, Judson Bradway was described as “the most active real estate developer in Bloomfield Township between 1912 and 1929;” indeed, it was this aspect of his career that is most notable today (Boom. Bust.). In one of the first moves to create residential properties in the area, Mr. Bradway along with few investors began purchasing land in 1913-1914 as Mr. John King, an active member of the Bloomfield Estates Improvement Association Inc., recalled in his 1992 speech to his peers (King). In 1914, the 350 acre property that was purchased between Charing

Cross Rd and Big Beaver Rd from Walker-Gordon Farm & Laboratory Co. (a dairy company) was officially platted as Bloomfield Estates and was the first of its kind in Oakland County; interestingly enough, this land previously was farmland allocated by the Federal Homestead Act, as was other land in the area, before its inception as a dairy farm around 1900 (Judson Bradway).

Within the next decade (1920-1930), Mr. Bradway would carry out his vision of creating a prominent residential community within the Bloomfield area. In 1924, Mr. Bradway and his established Judson Bradway Company would buy land surrounding Maple Rd. including Hupp farm that has become Bloomfield Village today (Smith 116-117). His firm also bought property between Lincoln and Quarton Rd. Mr. Bradway worked on numerous real estate developments simultaneously in the area such as the Trowbridge Farms area with his Trowbridge Farms Company. Inevitably, many of the “companies” that were formed for particular neighborhoods and their communities became homeowners associations that exist today and honor their legacy. In the monograph, *Bloomfield Blossoms: Glimpses into the History of Bloomfield Township and Bloomfield Hills, Michigan* which describes the history of the Bloomfield area from (Michigan's) pre-statehood to the late 70s, author, Kay Smith, mentions how, “every renovation and building project went through [Judsons] office,” expressing Mr. Bradway's grip for the city he envisioned (Smith 114-115). The author details Mr. Bradway's meticulous housing requirements from restrictions on street visibility of garage door openings to the positioning of properties on lots that are all so representative of the traditional upscale Bloomfield home (Smith 114-115).

Judson Bradway's relationship with the residential communities he established went beyond simply turning a profit, and throughout numerous instances in his career, Mr. Bradway, unironically, encompassed the Bloomfield Village Fire Departments motto, “progress not profit” (Bloomfield). In 1938, Mr. Bradway, like he had time-and-time again, went beyond his role as real estate mogul, and petitioned the state licensing bureau to allow Bloomfield Village access to the Birmingham fire department. However, upon auditing the cost that the program would

entail on village residents, Mr. Bradway and the residents, riding a wave of morale that would bring the nation together during the Second World War, instead established their own community fire department (the Bloomfield Village Protective Association) that would soon enter a contract to assist other surrounding communities in Southeastern Oakland County. This showcases one of the numerous occurrences in which Judson Bradway not only initiated a community but also served as a catalyst in bringing its inhabitants together (Bloomfield).

It is also during the troubling times of the Great Depression and Second World War that we can come to truly appreciate the stern belief in community building that Judson Bradway instilled in his work in Bloomfield. With the absences of liquidity in consumers' pockets as a result of the Depression, property purchasing demand decreased, sharply bringing down property values. In an interview with the Spring 2015 edition of the *Legacy* historical newsletter, Al Stephens, grandson of Arctic Ice Cream Co. president Alfred F. Stephens, recalls that "the Village property was being sold for 10-cents on the dollar (Boom. Bust.)." Even with home building in the area all but halted, one can only presume that Mr. Bradway and his company held onto their property with the conviction that the community would one day flourish even if they were operating at a massive loss at the moment. (Then) Current homeowners were selling their Bloomfield properties with Kay Smith documenting that "many sold against Bradway's pleas not to," with Mr. Bradway himself having to pay the price by losing one section of South Maple Rd (Smith 114-115). Mr. Bradway's conviction would pay off, however, as the market began to stabilize, and surge, in the coming decades. In his own words in a letter to Zillah Stephens (wife of Alfred F. Stephens) in May 1949, Mr. Bradway wrote that he was selling properties at half-price of their worth (then) twenty-three years ago, but that he was "thankful" for even a moderate demand in properties "after [having] carry[ed] them and paying taxes and maintenance for all those years..." (Boom. Bust.). The tone of gratitude displayed at such a modest improvement of conditions truly expresses Mr. Bradway's willingness to carry out his vision, even at the sacrifice of capital.

Today, Judson Bradway's resolute 1924 dream has become an exemplar for other developing communities state and nationwide with the seeds that he laid close to a century ago in creating the high-class residential area that Bloomfield has become. The classic architectural icons that stand in grandiose over centuries-old roads scattered around Bloomfield such as the Roosevelt and Taliaferro Houses are rooted in Mr. Bradway's developments; however, it also was the neighborhoods including Trowbridge Farms and Bloomfield Village that Judson Bradway not only developed and sold but also doing so while advocating for their services that depicts his intentions of creating a properly functioning community. Indeed, it is the story of a township revered by many that was fostered by a local man that can help guide us in our attempts of bettering our communities.

Word Count: 1199 (Including Citations within Essay)

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