



Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society - Research Article
West Bloomfield Township Pioneers: - The John Ellenwood
Family

by Neil Hepburn

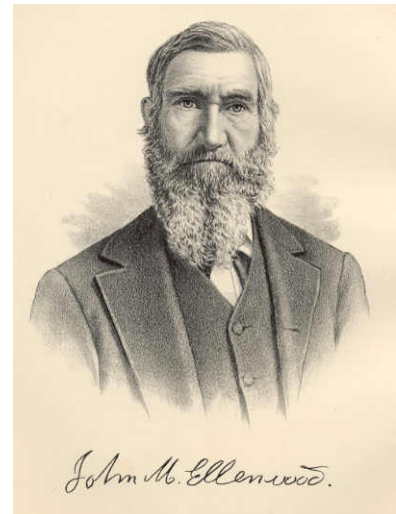
November 20, 2000

www.gwbhs.com

Being that election time is upon us, it seemed appropriate to write about a West Bloomfield pioneer family whose name was synonymous with local politics from the earliest days through the 1800s.

Born on September 15, 1777, John Ellenwood was among the earliest settlers in West Bloomfield. Both natives of Amherst Township, Hillsboro County, New Hampshire, John and his wife, Jane, first moved their young family to Ridgeway, Orleans Co., New York in 1816. Pushing further westward he purchased just over 65 acres bordering Bloomfield Township, from the U.S. government on May 23, 1825. Four months later, his son Ebenezer purchased an adjoining 45+ acre parcel to the north.

According to the History of Oakland County, Michigan (published in 1877), “They were moved up from Detroit by the horse-teams of Diodate Hubbard and John Hamilton (who, indeed, seem to have ‘moved’ nearly every other family who came into this and the adjoining townships in those years), and, with but a short halt in Pontiac, they proceeded without delay to their place of destination and settlement in the southeast quarter of section 12, on the eastern shore of Pine lake, to and beyond which point a kind of road had already been cut through, running westward of the present road, and close along the edge of the lake. The land of Mr. Ellenwood laid immediately north of and adjoining the farm of the first settler, John Huff, who, at this time, was engaged at work in Pontiac.” Huff, who had built a very large house of hewn logs on the shore of Pine Lake, invited the Ellenwood family to move in until a house of their own could be raised.



John and Jane were parents to five children – Calvin (1799-1873), Ebenezer (1803-1831), Jane (born 1805), Ismenia (born 1810), and John M. (1814-1898), all of whom were born in Amherst, New Hampshire.

Calvin had a family of his own, but came to Michigan with his parents, and remained with them on the farm at Pine Lake for several years after their arrival. The 1860 Federal Census places Calvin, his wife, Elvira, and an adult son in White Lake Township.

In December 1829 John's daughter Ismenia married Thomas Irish, son of Benjamin Irish, another of West Bloomfield's earliest settlers. Eben, as Ebenezer was known, who had settled just north of his father, married Lucinda Wilson in March 1830, but died less than a year later. Jane was married to Nathan Herrick.

The History of Oakland County, Michigan goes on to reveal that, "As may be supposed, the pecuniary circumstances of Mr. Ellenwood were not of the best on his arrival in Michigan. It was not convenient for him to purchase a cow, so in the fall he bargained with one of the West Bloomfield settlers to take one of his cows and keep her through the winter, which he could easily do, as the 'blue-joint' grass grew in great abundance all along the lake. In the same season he harvested a field of fifteen acres of wheat upon shares, and by this means procured breadstuff for his family, while John, the youngest son, who had already become an expert deer-slayer, had no trouble in keeping them well supplied with venison, having sometimes as many as six carcasses hung up in reserve at one time. The next spring he bargained with Ezra Rood and Asa B. Hadsell, of Bloomfield, to break and prepare four acres of ground for an orchard, Rood having a horse-team and Hadsell a yoke of oxen. This he set out with trees, many of which he procured from the Indian reservation at Orchard Island, and he also sowed the ground among them with wheat."

John, a surveyor by trade, did a considerable amount of survey work throughout Oakland County. According to the Portrait and Biographical Album of Oakland County, Michigan (published in 1891) he "laid out nearly every road that was put through at that day." John was also instrumental in having the Township's first Post Office established at Pine Lake in 1831, and was the only Postmaster to hold that office – a position he held for 25 years.

At the first annual meeting of the voters of West Bloomfield Township, on April 7, 1834, John Ellenwood, already serving as Justice of the Peace, was elected one of three School Commissioners and one of fourteen Overseers of Roads. At the same meeting, John's eldest son, Calvin, was elected one of three Commissioners of Highways. In subsequent years John was elected to the office of West Bloomfield Supervisor in 1835-1837, 1839, 1841-1844, and 1848. Additionally he served as Justice of the Peace in 1836, 1837, 1841, 1845, 1849, and 1853.

"Both John Ellenwood and his good wife were devout Christians and honored citizens of their township. This worthy gentleman was a member of the Territorial Legislature which framed the first constitution of Michigan, and was also a member of the next session. He was a staunch (sic) and sturdy Democrat, but did not allow his political views to land him into partisan actions which were not calculated to improve the condition of his county. He was well educated, and had a rich fund of information, having followed the profession of a teacher through many years of his earlier life. He married more couples than any other man in Oakland County in his day."

John died on May 9, 1856, at the age of 78. He is buried in Pine Lake Cemetery, a burial-ground first used for the interment of his son, Ebenezer, in 1831. John's wife, Jane, died April 1, 1861; she is buried beside her husband.

John's youngest son, John M. Ellenwood, was born June 29, 1814. A boy of eleven when his parents moved to Michigan, he lived the remainder of his life in West Bloomfield. In April 1839 he married Sarah Middaugh, of Bloomfield Township. Together they had 10 children – Ismenia S., Calvin, Phila J., Andrew S., Ismenia, Phoebe E., Levangy, Robert L., Julia, and Frances E. A Democrat like his father before him, John M. was elected to the office of Township Clerk in 1850. In 1864, he was also elected to fill a vacancy as a Justice of the Peace.

John M. Ellenwood eventually bought his parent's homestead, and by the time of his death on November 4, 1898, owned 120 acres straddling the Bloomfield/ West Bloomfield township border. John M. and his wife, Sarah, are both buried in Pine Lake Cemetery.