



## Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society - Research Article West Bloomfield Township Pioneers: - The John German

Family

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I hadn't planned on writing about the German family at this point in time, but recent events have cast a spotlight on the family that arrived in West Bloomfield in 1837. Those of you who regularly travel 14 Mile Road east of Middlebelt may know what I'm referring to. Those who don't may want to take a side trip to see what I'm so excited about.

Tom Ouellette is nothing short of a hero. Recently he purchased the ailing German House, a massive cut-stone masterpiece that had fallen upon very hard times in the past decade. The result of terrible neglect, the house had literally been falling apart and was the cause of great concern among neighbors and over at City Hall. Most thought its' fate was sealed – the wrecking ball. Just days before that decision was to be final, Tom was busy scrambling to see if there was another option. After a lot of soul-searching and providing proof of his plans' viability to city officials, Tom purchased the house no one else wanted. Now, a month later people are beginning to see his vision. Ouellette, and his son Tom, have completely gutted the structure, right down to the bare stone exterior walls. It was the only thing to do with a building that over the years had suffered everything from abuse to fire. They already have a new roof on it and have also replaced the front porch lost to decay long ago.



They've still got a lot of work to do, but even Tom Sr.'s wife now loves the place she thought might be his undoing. The German's would be very proud indeed.

John German, the patriarch of the West Bloomfield family, came to America in 1837, purchasing 200 Michigan acres for \$1.00 per acre. The land was part of a larger tract, all of West Bloomfield Township Section 36 (640 acres), originally purchased by speculator James Harrington of Cayuga County, New York, on May 15, 1823. John and his wife, Grace (Essary) German, had owned a farm near Biddeford, England, where their children were born. According to the Portrait and Biographical Album of Oakland County, published in 1891, John, a lifelong farmer, "was an intelligent citizen and attached himself to the Whig party and joined the Republican party after its formation, but he never took an active part in politics." John spent the remainder of his days in this county and "was in comfortable circumstances at the time of his decease."

John and Grace German had eight children: Richard, Ann, John, George, Mary, Betsey Jane, William, and Grace. By 1860, John had split his landholdings so that his male heirs might have farms of their own. The 1860 Federal Census reveals that two of his sons, George and William, are living side-by-side on the north side of 14 Mile, just inside the southern township boundary. The adjacent farms each include a house filled with a wife, children and unrelated farm laborers. Another son, John, a miller by trade, owned 137 acres in the neighboring village of Franklin.

George was born in Devonshire, England, on September 9, 1814. He and his Belgian-born wife Henrietta (Pins) farmed the western side of his father's land, eventually having eight children of their own: Emma A., Matilda J., George H., Henry E., Florence M., Alice A., Alfred J., and Edwin W. In later years George's mother Grace also lived with them. George eventually served as Supervisor of West Bloomfield Township four times and held almost all of the other township offices at one time or another. He also served as a director of the Monitor Insurance Company of Oakland County.



William, married to Canadian-born Betsey Ann, lived on the eastern side of John's original farm, in the house now being refurbished by Tom Ouellette. William is listed in the 1860 Federal Census as a 39-year-old farmer. In addition to his 28-year-old wife, the household contained the following children: Cordelia A. (15), John W. (12), Mary V. (9), Emily J. (6), and Oscar C. (1). William's father John, then 83 years old, was also living with them. Cordelia A. was probably the child of William's first wife, Elizabeth Mary, who died in 1845 at 18 years of age.

In time both George and William's land passed into new hands. By 1896, George's land was owned by his sons George H. and Henry E. These two appear to be the last Germans to own the western side of the original farmland. By 1917, C. V. Seeley, likely the husband of Alice A. (German) Seeley, owned the land that to this day contains the beautiful George German House. George German died in January 1903 at the age of 88, and is buried, as are over 40 family members, in Franklin Cemetery.

When William German died in 1864 his 70-acre farm passed into the hands of his elder brother John. At that time John appears to have moved his wife and children from Franklin back to the old family farm in West Bloomfield. John and his second wife, Jane Ann (White) German, had nine children: Elmore B., Alice J., Claricy, John D., Josephine, Franklin P., Emanuel N., Grace A., and Mary Ella. John also appears to have had an eldest daughter, Elizabeth C., by his first wife Charlott (sic) who died in 1840 at 22.

John, who died in 1884, passed the land and house on to his son Emanuel N., who owned them until his death in 1943. Although added to and modified over the decades,

the old stone house, part of which may have been built by pioneer settler John German, recently proved enticing enough to warrant Tom Ouellette's attention. Tom ultimately plans to sell the rebuilt house to some lucky family. I'm just glad he cared enough to ensure the home's survival. Tom invites everyone to stop by and see the progress for themselves. When you do, be sure to thank the man who saved an irreplaceable local historical landmark.