

# It's not Williamsburg, but, then, maybe it's better

*'Through the wooden doors, Congleton may be seen working on a lightweight buggy. Curved pieces of hickory wood hang over his head, drying. Congleton makes buggies for farmers who can afford to keep a fast trotter in the barn next to their team of work horses or oxen used for heavy hauling.'*

— From Bettie Waddell Cannon's "All About Franklin."



Franklin's Buggy Works, a blacksmith shop which was owned by George Congleton from 1849 to 1876. It still stands at 32760 Franklin Road. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg)

By BETTIE W. WADDELL CANNON

Travelers scuff through leaves fallen from 200-year-old oaks on their tour of the main street of this village.

They eat lunch in the parlor of an 1840 Greek Revival house, or stroll into the old graveyard, or sip new cider beside a river from which water powered the machinery of settlers and farmers.

This place is not Williamsburg or Old Sturbridge Village, but the closest to-home Franklin Village, Michigan's first historic district, in southeastern Oakland County.

You can take the same nostalgic walking tour, after driving out to the village, west of Telegraph Road, east of Orchard Lake Road, between 13 and 14 Mile roads.

Park the car at the Franklin Cider Mill, which is open seven days a week, at 14 Mile and Franklin Road. Ignore, for now, if you can, the pungent smell of cider and the spicy fragrance of doughnuts cooking. You will return later to partake of these delights and to buy apples and grapes, comb honey and sausages.

Walk south across 14 Mile into the village and you enter Southfield Township. The township, like all those in Michigan, is six miles square and contains 36, one-mile-square sections. The original village of Franklin encompassed sections five and six, and began as two large farms. Although the cider mill, once a flour mill, influenced Franklin's economic and social life for 150 years, it is not in Franklin at all. It is across township boundaries in Bloomfield Township.

THE INTERSECTION where you stand was once the busiest in Franklin. Two mills, a distillery, a cheese factory, and blacksmith and shoe shops were located here. On the southeast corner was an early tavern, later a post office, made of logs. The tavernkeeper sold whiskey to weary settlers who were making their way into their bush-filled acreage.

In the 1850s, farmers stopped at the village taverns after delivering war loads of wheat to the grist mill. Legend has it that sometimes they stayed two or three days.

Just a few steps south, on the corner of Evelyn

Court, stands one of the oldest structures in Franklin. It was the home of Peter and Amy Van Every when they came of Franklin to build the mill in 1837 — the year Michigan became a state. South across Evelyn Court is the home of Franklin's first well-digger, who was also a justice of the peace. One of his court cases involved his brother's wife, who was accused of disturbing the peace.

The red frame building south of this spot is the Franklin Hotel and is thought to have been a stage stop until the early 1900s. The hotel once was a battleground between "wets" and "drys" in Franklin.

In what is now Gorbach's Photography Shop, Elijah Bullock, the second settler in Franklin, also established a tavern. It is the oldest building in Franklin and was a barber shop in the 1800s complete with a singing quartet on the front veranda.

Walking south, you find the village green on your right. This used to be farmland. A historical marker placed there in 1960 by the grandson of original settlers marks the place. South of the green is a gray frame house, now the village offices and police department.

This house was owned in 1866 by Daniel Broughton, who, it is said, eloped one snowy night with the daughter of Peter Van Every, mill owner. You may go into this building. Your tour should continue going south and uphill on Franklin Road. Just above the Broughton House is the site of Franklin's first log schoolhouse which held 29 scholars its first summer session in 1826. The children often missed recess when they were caught walking the wooden fence around the graveyard.

Go through the large wrought iron gates to your left on Scenic Highway and enter the 150-year-old cemetery. It was built on a sandy ridge to make it easier for men to dig new graves; the cemetery holds ancestors of many Southfield and Franklin people who still manage the cemetery.

Walk back to Franklin Road, cross the street and retrace your steps north through the village. Atop the hill is the historic Franklin school.

AT THE FOOT of School Hill, the place for many wild sled rides on past winter days, is the

little red schoolhouse built in 1845. Picture the road as a sandy lane deeply rutted from heavy grain and lumber wagons pulled by teams of horses.

North of the school are two pleasant, narrow streets — German Mill and Carol. Though none of the houses are open to the public, it is worth a walk into the quaint part of the village. These small homes are typical of those built in the 19th century by tinsmiths, coopers, millers and other tradesmen who served farmers of the time. At the foot of German Mill are the remnants of an old mill race and the footings of another flour mill.

Between German Mill and Carol Streets on Franklin Road is a large brick house built in 1901 on the site of the first brick house in Oakland County, which was destroyed. The two-story grocery store a few steps north was originally built as the Macabees Lodge Hall and had meeting rooms upstairs.

Ahead of one of the most interesting sections of the village. The Franklin Tea Room is housed in the former George Congleton House, which was built right next door to the Congleton Blacksmith Shop and Buggy Works. This was common practice in rural villages but later ignored by modern-day workers who insist on the separation of work and home.

The former blacksmith shop was destroyed by fire recently and is being reconstructed on old lines. It is to be re-opened in November as a gift shop. The tall building next door, now a beauty salon, once was a billiards hall and was built in 1914 by the last Van Every to live in Franklin.

The next structure on your tour is the Van Every Mansion. It was from this house that Lovinia Van Every eloped with Daniel Broughton.

NOW FOLLOW your nose to the cider mill. Step inside the dim, heavy-beamed building. Cider is pressed from apples while you watch, and you can buy cider and hot doughnuts and go out back to see the over-shot water wheel turning the waters of Franklin River.

Perhaps, as you enjoy the scent of apples, the sound of the river still steaming by and the sight of fellow travelers, you will take time to reflect on this bit of local history.

## TRAVEL LOG of Iris Jones



DULUTH, Minn. — Robert Wyness is part of the people experience — a slim gray-haired man who has lived in the gardener's house at the Glensheen mansion since he was 6 years old.

His father was a gardener for the wealthy Pisk family in Boston, when the owner of this house, a mining magnate called Chester Congdon, lured him here to these gardens on the edge of Lake Superior. Wyness remembers the horses, and the ice wagons of the old days. He also remembers the murder that ended the private life of this house two years ago.

Murder is part of the human experience, too. Unfortunately, it can give to this elegant mansion a morbid fascination a tourist might not otherwise feel when touring an old house.

MISS ELIZABETH, the last surviving child of the original owners, was murdered in her bed in the upstairs bedroom two years ago. There, on that staircase, her nurse was bludgeoned to death with a brass candlestick.

Miss Elizabeth was in her 80's. Her son-in-law was convicted of the murder and her adopted daughter cleared of a charge of conspiracy. Duluth residents followed this trial with horror and fascination, but the tour guides in the mansion are not allowed to talk about it. This naturally makes everyone even more curious than they were to begin with.

The house was willed to the University of Minnesota at Duluth and has been open to the public since July 1979. More than 37,000 people have walked its elegant carpets since then. To compound the unreal feeling you carry with you through the mansion, your tour guide might very well be Vera Dunbar, who was Miss Elizabeth's business secretary and knows hundreds of details about the house.

"In this room you see the marble, vases and lamps imported from the Middle East." In this front hallway, there is a Persian rug that once belonged to a monarch. See how the hot water pipes under the kitchen sink

have been used to warm food and how this bell system was once used to alert servants to Miss Elizabeth's needs."

WHILE WE FOLLOW the litany attentively, we hear others whispering to the docents behind us. They are not allowed to comment on the murder, but they all roll their eyes to heaven when they acknowledge that Miss Elizabeth's adopted daughter was acquitted. Miss Elizabeth was a popular old lady in Duluth.

Wyness knew Miss Elizabeth all his life, from the day he followed his landscaper-father to the gardener's house on the edge of the flowerbeds at age 6, through the days of the horses and the ice house, to the moment when house became a museum.

He and his wife live in the small house at the edge of the garden; it was small at first by turn-of-the-century standards, although most of us would be pleased to live in it. Every day he ties back plants, weeds the gardens, and otherwise cares lovingly for the estate that has always meant life to him.

For the tourist, the house is more likely to signify death.

Its fascination goes beyond the gardens and the chandeliers, to the house as a setting for murder. Oddly enough, a murder mystery film was produced in this house and is shown regularly on late night television. It is called, ironically, "You'll Like My Mother."

## About the author

Bettie Waddell Cannon of West Bloomfield is the author of "All About Franklin: From Pioneers to Preservation," recently published by the Four Corner's Press under the sponsorship of the Franklin Historical Society.

Ms. Cannon is a freelance writer who has worked for 18 months researching and writing this local history.

The book tells the story of Franklin people and includes settlers of 1824, the farming families of the 1850s, the tradesmen who served them, and the suburban residents of the 20th century. Newspaper accounts, ledgers, diaries, government records, oral histories and interviews were used to compile the 150-page book.

Two Franklin artists, David McCall Johnston and Max Altekruze, were commissioned by the



BETTIE WADDELL CANNON

Franklin Historical Society to do the original drawings, some taken from old photographs collected from long-time local residents.

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