



Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society

Research Article

West Bloomfield Township Pioneers: The Samuel Coe Family by Neil Hepburn

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles highlighting early West Bloomfield Township residents whose farmhouses still exist today as a reminder of what our area was like in the mid- to late-1800s.

On a hill, on the south side of present-day Maple Road, just east of the very busy intersection at Haggerty, sits a petite, white frame house with narrow, horizontal second-story windows characteristic of the 1840s time period in which it was built. Located at the corner of the township, The Wren's Nest, as it is now known, has witnessed an amazing amount of change beyond its doorstep. But as with many of the areas' original structures, change is something that has been a constant since the family that built the house first arrived in Michigan.

Samuel Coe was born in Dutchess County, New York about 1782. Located between the Hudson River and the western edge of Connecticut, encompassing the rolling land around Poughkeepsie, the county was settled mostly by those of Dutch and English extraction. Samuel married and fathered at least four children, including sons John M. and Edward, while still living in New York State.

On April 30, 1832, a John Coe, most likely Samuel's eldest son, purchased 80 acres in West Bloomfield Township from the U.S. Government. This land (E ½ of SE ¼ of Section 31) was in the southwestern-most section of the budding township, at the northwest corner of 14 Mile Road and Halsted, kitty-corner from the Minnow Pond and close to settlement that was occurring just to the south in West Farmington. On July 5, 1832 John, perhaps after actually seeing the land he had purchased, sold out to Z. Green. Later in the year, on October 15, a John M. Coe purchased 80 acres in Section 31 of West Bloomfield Township (W ½ of NE ¼); this land fronted on Maple Road. The next day John M. purchased an additional 42.86-acre parcel in Oakland County's Groveland Township. These were indeed times of rampant land speculation.

Presumably, Samuel and many of his children relocated to Michigan along with his son, John M. According to D.A.R. records, in 1832, Samuel, now 50, married for a second time to Lucinda Gage in West Bloomfield. Lucinda was born about 1793 in Montgomery County, New York. In total Samuel fathered 10 children: John M., Henry, Nancy, Edward, Sarah Ann, Reuben, Samuel Harrison, Lucinda, Esther and Caroline. It is not known whether Lucinda Gage was the birth mother of any of them. On October 9, 1835 Samuel Coe assumed legal ownership of the 80 acres that bordered Maple Road.

Little is known of Samuel's day-to-day activities over the ensuing years. No doubt he worked to clear his land as those around him were doing. Many of the farms surrounding his were planted with extensive apple orchards, the remnants of which are visible today. At some point, most likely during the 1840s, Samuel built a small clapboard house to shelter his family. What is known, sadly, is that he died on October 13, 1849, at the age of 67. He is buried in West Farmington Cemetery on Halsted Road, just south of 12 Mile. His wife, Lucinda, inherited the 80-acre farm and the house upon it.

Samuel's offspring, like most children, grew up and made their own marks on the world. His eldest son, John M. Coe, the original purchaser of the land containing the Samuel Coe House, married Lovisa, daughter of neighbors Samuel and Lemira Mead. Their time together was short however, as Lovisa died in May 1838, at the age of 21, most likely while giving birth to her daughter Louisa. John M., a widower at 27, eventually became a Baptist clergyman, living with his younger brother Edward's family.

Edward, Samuel's fourth child, was born in New York on March 14, 1821. On February 12, 1845, at the age of 23, he married 22-year-old Henrietta Long of Commerce Township. Their children included William H., Duane W., Carson, John F. and Fred D. The 1860 Federal Census shows Edward and Henrietta Coe living on Maple Road in West Bloomfield Township with their five sons, Edward's widowed mother, Lucinda, and Edward's brother, John M. Edward's younger brother, Reuben, is living nearby on the farm of Harvey Famner. On New Years Eve 1872, at the age of 79, Lucinda Coe died. She is buried in West Farmington Cemetery where she and Samuel share a headstone.

On February 25, 1876 Edward purchased 60 acres (W $\frac{3}{4}$ of E $\frac{1}{2}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 31) from a Mr. Moore. This land was adjacent to the east of the 80 acres left to him by his parents. On October 24, 1883 Edward split the 60 acres into two equal parts and transferred it to son Duane and George C. Coe, possibly a nephew.

Some years later, on July 8, 1891, Edward deeded a 1 acre parcel off the northeast corner of his remaining 80 acres to his son William H. The 1896 West Bloomfield Township plat map at the GWBHS museum shows a house on this small parcel, as well as both aforementioned 30-acre parcels. According to DAR records, Edward Coe died in 1897. The site of his burial is currently unknown to this researcher.

In 1904 the original 80 acres, minus the 1 acre owned by William H. Coe, passed into the hands of George Heliker. This was not the beginning of the end of the Coe name in West Bloomfield however. In 1908 there were still four different Coes living in Section 31 - William H. Coe, Duane W. Coe, R. Coe and Carson Coe - the latter living on 36+ acres in the SW corner of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$, fronting Haggerty Road (now known as the Gaslight Subdivision).

In 1910 Frank A. Murray purchased the 79-acre parcel containing the Samuel Coe House. By 1975 the 79 acres had been divided into four parcels, with Samuel's house resting on a nine-acre lot. The nine acres have since been further sub-divided and currently the Coe House sits on approximately 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres.

Over time the house was added onto and updated. Remember, it was built at a time when there was no indoor plumbing, electricity, or central heating systems. At one point the entire structure was picked up and moved farther from Maple Road, so that the busy street could be widened to accommodate growing traffic.

The Samuel Coe House was eventually purchased by Irene Scheel in 1961 and there she raised her five children. In 1994 she began operating the house as The Wren's Nest, a delightful bed-and-breakfast with six charming guest rooms and expansive perennial gardens.

Recently awarded the West Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce's annual "Beautification Award" for her landscaping efforts, Irene has also filled the grounds with a marvelous variety of hand-painted birdhouses. Out-of-town guests who cannot fit into your own house would be well advised to call Irene at 248-624-6874. They will get a unique taste of what it was like to live in West Bloomfield Township some 150 years ago.