

Historic Houses – Redfern-Kern-Blomdahl House

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The Redfern house was the first cement-block house built in the area in 1904 by C. W. Redfern. Robert Osborne of Claybanks did the woodwork on the house. By 22 December 1904, it was reported that C. W. Redfern and his sister, Mrs. Anna Scott, had moved their household goods into their new residence near the depot and were busy getting settled in. It was described as neat and attractive in appearance.

Charles Walwyn Redfern was born on 1 May 1847 in Caldonia, Monroe County, New York. He was one of three children born to Matthew and Hannah (ne Hines) Redfern. He came to Michigan with his parents and siblings, Annie Elizabeth (1837-1908) and Francis William (1842-1936) in September 1853, settling in Convis Township, Calhoun County, MI, where they remained until 1866 when they moved to their new home two miles north of Montague.

It appears that they came to the area on the lumber schooner Maggie from Chicago, arriving at the mouth of White Lake on 23 April 1866. There was a snowbank on the pier three feet deep at the time. The Maggie docked at the Ferry-Dowling wharf where the Redfern family was met by other family members who were already in the area. The remainder of the journey to their new home in the woods was made by lumber wagon and ox team.

Redfern's education was obtained in the local district school. Through outside study he prepared himself to be a schoolteacher and taught his first school in Claybanks township. While teaching school he became interested in the telegraph and when the railroad was built through the area, he became a

telegraph operator and station agent at Montague, later being transferred to Whitehall with the added duties of steamboat passenger agent.

After 18 years with the railroad, he entered the hardware business which was destroyed at the time of the fire which destroyed all of Whitehall's business district in 1890. For several years after this he operated a florist business but was compelled to give it up due to his health. For the last few years of his life, Redfern was engaged in the real estate business and as a newspaper correspondent for the Muskegon Chronicle and the Grand Rapids Press.

Redfern, who never married, died at his home in Whitehall on 14 January 1922 and is buried in Oakhurst Cemetery along with his parents and siblings.

In March 1926, C.C. Kern moved into his recently purchased Redfern cottage. Charles Christian Kern was born 13 October 1865 in Millstadt, Illinois. He married Clara Louise Bubmann on 21 February 1900 in Chicago, IL. They had two daughters, Edna Agnes (1902-1999) and Helen Roberta (1913-2007). Kern was in the grocery business in Chicago for many years before coming to the White Lake area in 1921. They purchased A. P. Schnellenberger's White Lake Grocery on Colby Street, which was located where Ramthun's Restaurant et al was and where Posh by Pitkin is now. Clara died in February 1934. Charles C. Kern then married Elmay Kemp, owner of the Idlewild Resort, on 21 July 1934. He also operated the Arcade at Sylvan Beach for many years.

Charles Kern's daughter Edna had married local resident Leonard Blomdahl on 12 October 1925. In January 1935 they purchased the J. C. Jacobson grocery store also located on Colby Street in an area which is now the eastern part of Hokey Pokey store. They operated Leonard and Edna's Food Shop until 1956.

C. C. Kern owned and operated the White Lake Grocery in Whitehall for 23 years before retiring in mid-October 1944. Being in extremely poor health, he was advised by his physicians to remain in bed for some time. His son-in-law and daughter, Leonard & Edna, then took over the stock of his store and closed out his business.

Charles Kern died on 14 October 1946. His second wife Elmay continued to live in the house for a while until she moved to the Idlewild Resort which she had previously owned and sold to her brother, Samuel Shelhamer in May 1947. Elmay later moved to the Masonic Home in Alma where she lived for about a year prior to her death on 24 December 1963.

In the meantime, Leonard and Edna had moved into the Redfern-Kern house. It became well known throughout the area for its elaborate gardens. Leonard Blomdahl had been born in the Maple Grove area in 1899. He died 21 December 1989.

While Leonard and Edna had no children of their own, they took an interest in the area's young people, giving them jobs at their store and often assisting them in their educational endeavors. They later established the Leonard and Edna K. Blomdahl Scholarship Fund for students from the White Lake area and Muskegon County.

Edna served 21 years on the Whitehall City Council, two of those years as Mayor Pro-tem. In addition, she served on the Whitehall Board of Review. She wrote a popular food column for the Whitehall Forum. She was an active member of the Arts Council of White Lake and served as chairperson of the White

Lake Community Fund. She spent time as chairperson of the White Lake Senior Center Board; was an active member of the White Lake Historical Society and the White Lake Women's Club. During her lifetime she volunteered for organizations such as the American Red Cross and served as a guide for the Hackley and Hume Home historical sites. She established the Leonard and Edna K. Blomdahl Fund to support community services and programs for the elderly, beautification of the community, and to provide other essential services.

Edna Agnes Kern Blomdahl died on Christmas Day 1999. She and Leonard are both buried in Oakhurst Cemetery.

Following Edna's death, it was reported that John and Sue Dillivan had taken over the house and the tending of the Blomdahl gardens. Over the succeeding years, several others have owned the house.

On 8 June 2015 a blaze broke out at the former Blomdahl house. At the time it was occupied by the Mike Schneider family. Damage seemed to be contained to an area on the front corner of the first level and the attic space above.

The house was then renovated by Greg and Debi Hillebrand and later they operated it as an Airbnb for a while.

It now appears that the house once again has new owners to add to its history, and they have expressed the desire to re-establish the Blomdahl gardens. May they have gentle rains and sunny days shine on them.