

# Home Section

SUNDAY,  
AUGUST 18, 1963

Part Seven

REMODELING

DECORATING

FURNISHINGS

GARDENING

## The Past in Our Present

# A West Side Story

By H. RUSSELL  
ZIMMERMANN

Now a part of Washington park, "Baumbach's Woods" was named for a family of German aristocrats that once owned and lived on the property.

The family's homestead at 1440 N. 40th st. — although not on its original site — stands today as the sole reminder of those early days more than a century go.

The story could be said to begin in the 18th century with the birth in 1799 of Ludwig von Baumbach at Kirchheim, Prussia. A landed proprietor and army captain, he gained recognition in the battle of Waterloo and was president for a number of years of the Landtag (parliament) of Hessen-Cassel.

### Frustrated Reformer

Ludwig, however, chose to ally himself with a group of liberals hoping to establish a constitutional government. The revolution was defeated and he was forced to leave in 1848.

The von Baumbach family, including six sons and a daughter, came to America and settled in Elyria, Ohio, in 1849. The next year, Ludwig

purchased 40 acres of land bounded roughly by what is now W. Vliet st. on the north, N. 37th and N. 43rd sts. and the present railroad tracks on the south.

Although the land was purchased in 1849, the family did not come here until 1856. The origin of the home in which they lived is not clear. There may be a clue, however, in an old agreement signed by one Patrick Murray, who was the original owner of a 250 acre farm which included the tract purchased by von Baumbach.

The document describes

the rental of a brickyard, fully equipped, to one Christopher Kindland and states that Murray agreed . . . "to erect a house in a convenient spot on said yard on or before the first day of April, 1848 . . . all complete except plastering."

The brickyard and kilns were on the property purchased by von Baumbach. Early maps show two buildings on that tract and it is uncertain whether he remodeled a small farmhouse or built a new structure. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the house was built from bricks manufactured in his own yard.

### Named Counsel

Shortly after the family moved here, Ludwig was appointed consul for several Bavarian states. Later, following the unification of Germany, he was named imperial counsel here for that country.

Five of his sons moved elsewhere, several establishing noteworthy records. Moritz organized the German Exchange bank, which later consolidated with the First Wisconsin National bank. In 1883, at Ludwig's death, he

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Ludwig von Baumbach



# Flight From Prussia Brought

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succeeded his father to the German consul post.

William built a successful nursery and lived in Wauwatosa. Charles founded a wholesale drug firm which, after his retirement, became the Yahr Lange Drug Co.

The eldest son, Ernst, continued to live with his parents in the old home, then located on the old Milwaukee and Wauwatosa Plank rd. (now Vliet st.).

Ernst expanded the family holdings, eventually buying out his father's share. In 1875, he purchased 56 acres to the north of present W. Vliet. The site extended some 900 feet west from what is now N. 39th st. into what became Washington park and once was known as "Baumbach's Woods."

Sometime between 1875 and 1880, the old von Baum-

bach homestead was moved to its present site. It was carried on 12 inch beams and jacked up to the second story level.

The floor walls were raised to support the load and the beams removed. Four scars show where bricks were added to fill the holes left by the beams.

### House Was Sold

Ernst began piecemeal sale of his extensive land holdings in 1886. A large section of it was included in the 150 acres purchased by the park commission and opened as "West park" in 1891. It was changed to Washington park nine years later. It seems an interesting coincidence that the land owned by the German consul should later become the setting for statues of Goethe, Schiller and von Steuben.

Ernst was last listed at the

"farm" in 1896. He had previously sold the property to Reinhold Kiesslich, a shipping clerk for the Phillip Best Brewing Co., predecessor of the Pabst Brewing Co.

The Kiesslichs had built another home to the south of the von Baumbach homestead and did not occupy the latter until later. But they did make a number of changes and additions to the property, including a barn at the rear and a wider front porch.

Reinhold's son, Edward, was an architect and two windows were cut into the southwest corner of the old homestead to create an office from what had been a fruit storage room.

### Floor Sagged Badly

The Kiesslichs have been remembered in the name of the street which runs along the south of their frame house, although the city has

mispelled the street to "Kisslich."

Another architect, Alexander Guth, lived in the home while it still was owned by the Kiesslich family. In 1941, it was purchased by Kirby L. Goodman, who lives there today.

When he acquired the house, the second floor sagged badly and had to be jacked up. Much of the interior was gutted and the entire interior rebuilt.

The first floor is less than 8 feet in height, while the second floor (actually the origi-

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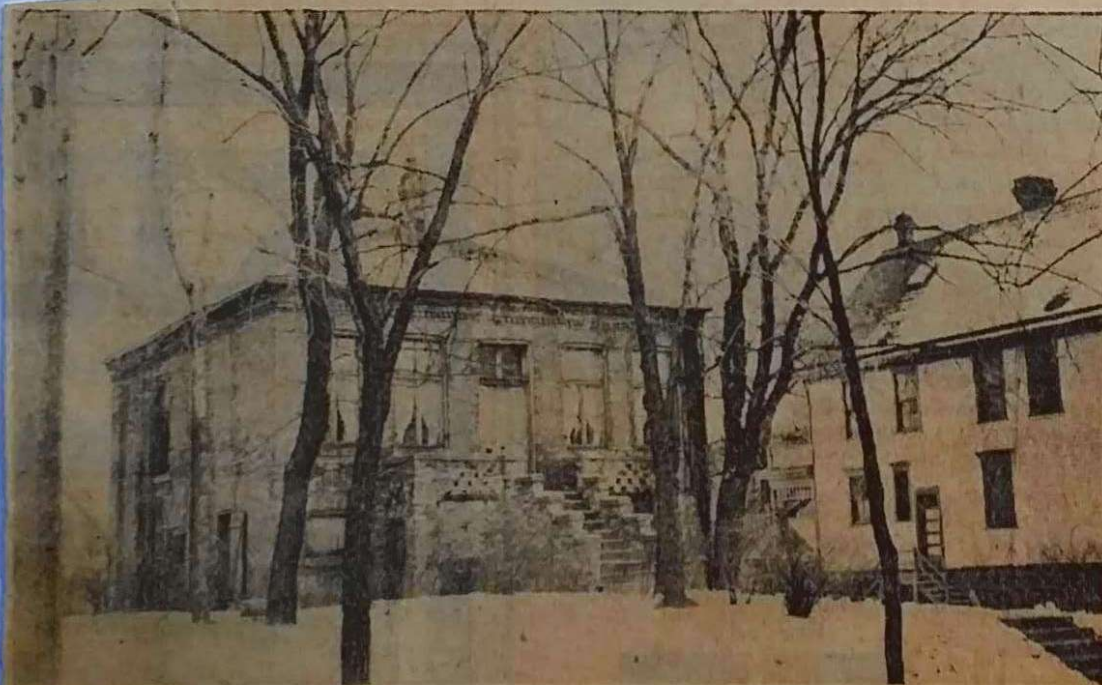
*The author of this series is a devotee of history and design in Milwaukee and is former historian for Land Ethics, Inc., a nonprofit organization interested in old buildings.*

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nal floor) is a surprising 12 feet. The old house is built of cream colored brick, with solid walls 18 inches thick on the first floor and 12 inches on the second level. It is roughly a square, measuring 58 feet on a side. The roof is hipped and sports four chimneys and a skylight.

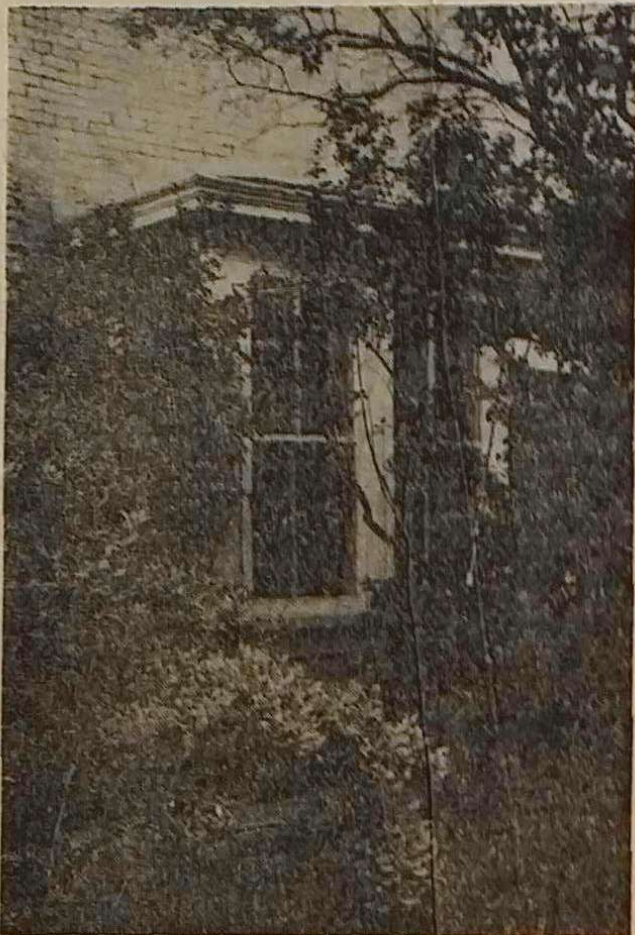
The most interesting architectural feature is the brick cornice which shows, in two courses, an imaginative ornamental use of plain brick. The humble house is complimented by a lavish variety of greens, including four varieties of lilac bushes, two chestnut trees and a large maple.

Few can remember the old "plank road" or the old "Baumbach's Woods," and only the old von Baumbach home has withstood the erosion of time. In the front yard stands a gas street lamp from the old Port Washington road, sympathetically placed there by its present owner.

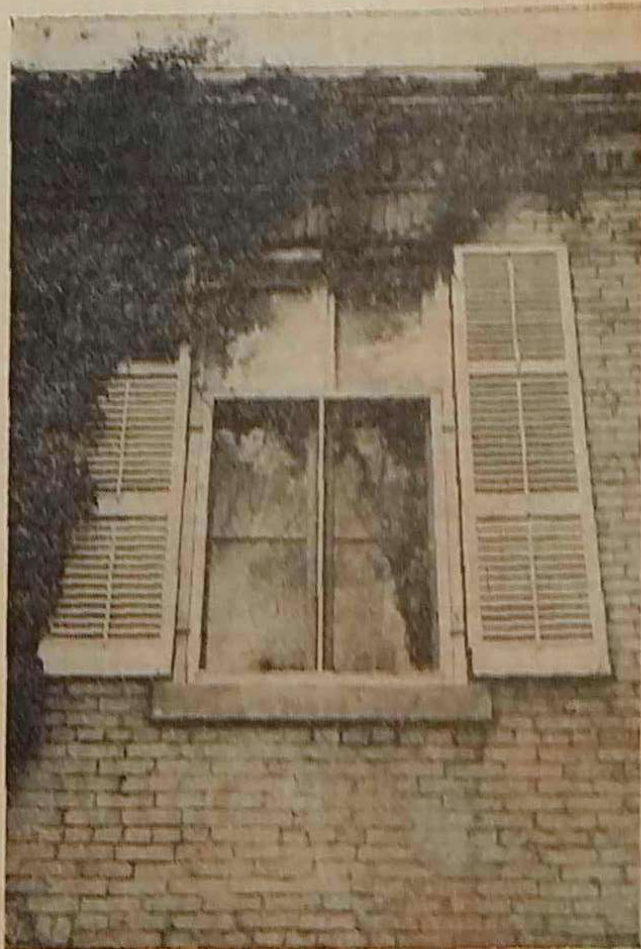


The old home, shown in this photo taken in the 1940s, shows the wider brick porch added by the Kiesslichs when they were the owners. About this time, the home had passed into the possession of Kirby L. Goodman, the present owner. Note the lower windows added to give light to the first floor area.

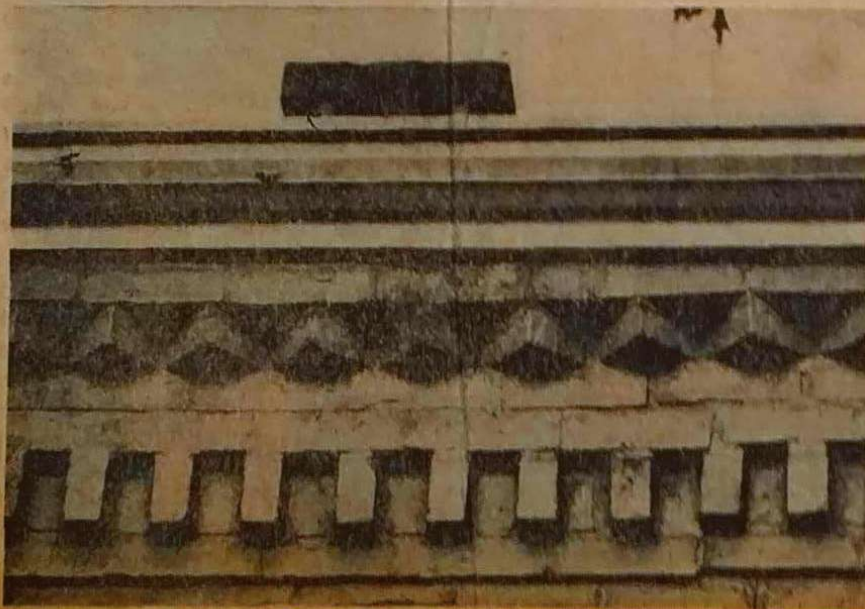
# Family to This Home Here



This window bay was added to the von Baumbach home when it was moved to its present site sometime shortly after 1875 and raised to rest atop a new first floor level. The rear portion was used then as a kitchen and dining room; the front part was a storage area. Today, the bay is used as a flower conservatory.

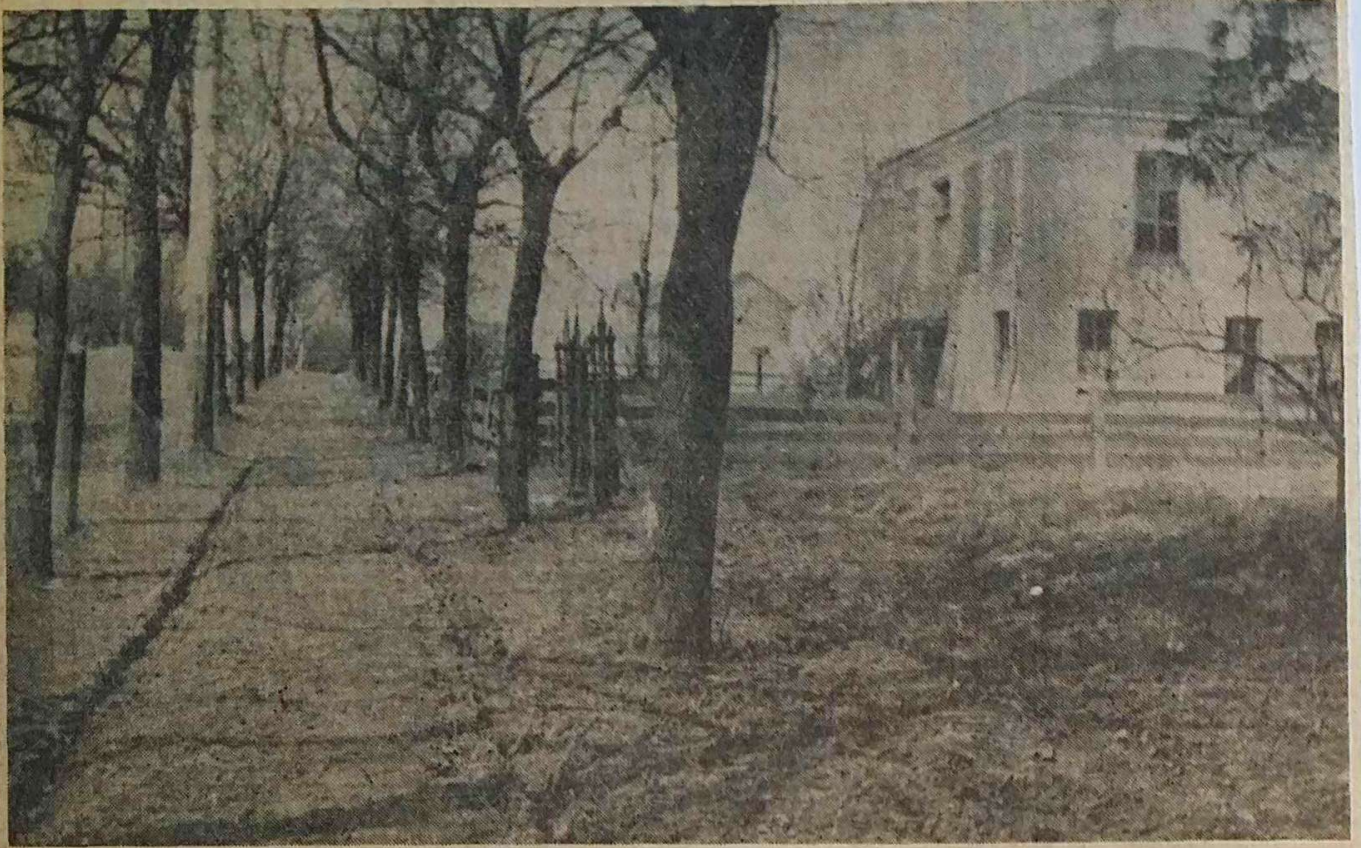


This second floor window (originally the first floor) still has the original shutters—a reminder of the era when window shutters really were used. The brick is believed to be at least 112 years old and manufactured in kilns on the site of the home's original location south of present W. Vliet.



Perhaps the most unusual architectural feature of the von Baumbach house is the brick ornamental cornice set in two courses—work done at least by 1856, perhaps even earlier, when the building was erected.

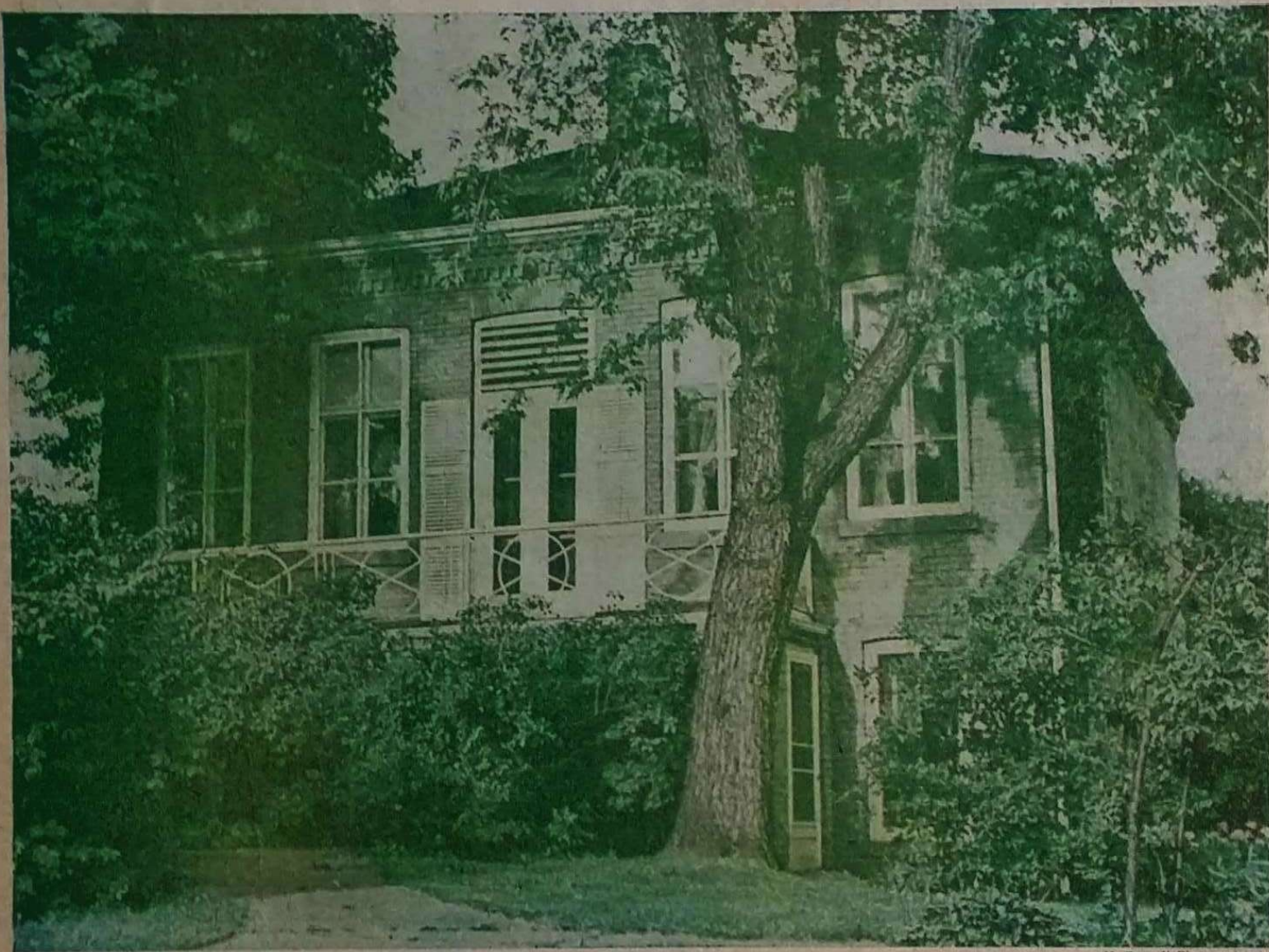
—Photos on this page by H. Russell Zimmermann



Back at the turn of the century, only an unpaved road (now N. 40th st.) and a dirt sidewalk stretched before the von Baumbach home. The view across the street to the west looked toward Washington park, already nine years old. Before the park and intervening road came into being, a portion of the area was known as "Baumbach's Woods." By this time (1900) ownership of the home already had passed from the family of Ludwig von Baumbach, who had immigrated here in 1856.



This view from the southwest of the von Baumbach house (background) shows a frame house in which lived the Reinhold Kiesslich family, by then also owners of the von Baumbach dwelling. The corn patch (foreground) later made way for W. Kisslich pl. (so misspelled by city planners).



—H. Russell Zimmermann

Despite the lapse of more than 85 years, time has brought few changes to the old von Baumbach homestead. It stands today at 1440 N. 40th st. (above), overlooking what was once known as "Baumbach's

woods," now a part of Washington park. The earliest known picture of the house (left) was taken shortly after the house was moved to the site from its earlier location between 1875 and 1880. The home,

built south of W. Vliet st., originally was one story. It was raised and a lower level added when it was moved to its present site. The brick is believed to have been made in kilns at the original site.

From: **David Boucher** amaranthbc@gmail.com  
Subject: New photo of VB  
Date: June 16, 2017 at 12:37 PM  
To: Mike and Judy Howden mjhowden@att.net

BD

