

Brighton Cemetery

Tucked away from the bustle of traffic and business at East Avenue and Winton Road is a small rural cemetery. Begun in 1821 to serve the needs of the growing population at Brighton Centre, it is the final resting place for some of Brighton's earliest settlers.

A microcosm of Brighton history, some of the town's earliest settlers are buried there alongside twenty-first century graves. Orringh Stone (Stone-Tolan House) and his family are there, and Amasa Drake, supervisor of the building of the first Erie Canal aqueduct over the Genesee River. Justus Yale was a Brighton nurseryman, and the Buckland brothers, Abner, Amos, and Leonard, made bricks. William Clough Bloss, abolitionist and friend of Frederick Douglass is buried there as is his sister Celestia Angenette Bloss, an early nineteenth century educator. Under a U.S. government-issued military stone is the prolific author of local history lore, Arch Merrill, who served in World War I.

One can trace the evolution of monuments from the very spare early nineteenth century headstones, to the later, "prettier" ones with trailing willow branches and carved roses, to the more substantial polished granite of recent years. A tall monument, visible in the winter from Interstate 490, is not made of stone. It is the Watson family memorial fashioned from zinc, a relatively rare use for the metal also called "white bronze."

The cemetery was founded by the Brighton Congregational Church in 1821 when the church building stood on the hill overlooking the Erie Canal. A few pre-1821 headstones reflect the burials that were moved to the new cemetery from family farm plots. In 1867 the small brown painted brick church burned to the ground. When it was rebuilt, the new location was on East Avenue just west of the Winton Road intersection. About that time, it became Brighton Presbyterian Church. In 1892 the church divested itself of the responsibility of operating the cemetery. A non-profit cemetery association formed that managed maintenance and burials under the direction of a board of trustees. That association continues to oversee cemetery care. Recent removal of overgrown trees and shrubs and the repair of fallen headstones have improved the appearance and opened the possibility of columbaria along the fence line.

The discovery of the remnants of Erie Canal Lock #63 on the east side of the cemetery further connects this old and revered place to the history of the community.

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