



# HISTORIC BRIGHTON NEWS

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## *The Interurban Era*

A presentation by

Jim Dierks, New York Museum of Transportation

**Thursday, October 29<sup>th</sup> — 7:30PM**

**Brighton Town Hall Auditorium**

**2300 Elmwood Avenue Rochester NY 14618**

Jim Dierks, the current Secretary of the Board of The New York Museum of Transportation, will deliver a slide show and talk entitled "The Interurban Era", highlighting the trolley railroad which ran between Rochester, Canandaigua and Geneva from 1900 to 1930. Jim, will also review the overall trolley railroad system which was a very common means of transportation in the early part of the 20th century.

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## **Historic Brighton Photographs at Grinnell's**

**By Mary Jo Lanphear, Town of Brighton Historian**

The photographs on display at Grinnell's restaurant on Monroe Avenue in Brighton represent Brighton history from the settlement period to the mid-twentieth century. The earliest photograph is the picture of the 1792 Stone-Tolan House in the 1940s with Brighton town historian A. Emerson Babcock strolling across the lawn of the white-painted house. After the Landmark Society bought the property in the 1960s, the organization conducted a paint analysis and discovered the original deep red color that now covers the clapboards again.

The portrait of Oliver Culver, Brighton's first town supervisor, is a photograph of a painting that is part of the Pioneer Portrait collection of the Rochester Historical Society. Oliver Culver's house still stands on East Boulevard, once part of Brighton, now part of the city of Rochester.

The framed 1872 map shows the town and the village of Brighton thirty-three years before the latter was annexed by the city of Rochester. The town map shows the large farms that dominated Brighton's landscape throughout the nineteenth century. Several of those farms were located on Westfall Road as seen in the photographs of the Kohlman farm, the Hartley farm, and the Amos B. Buckland farm. Leonard Buckland, brother of Amos, is seen in a formal late-nineteenth century portrait. He operated the Buckland Brick Works in Brighton with his brother, Abner.

Isaac Moore's brick house is shown in a photograph taken before the paving of Clover Street. Isaac Moore was a farmer and brick maker in the nineteenth century who had a keen interest in the education of his children, hiring his sister-in-law, Celestia Bloss, to found a private, coeducational school. Another photograph shows the nearby public school at the corner of Elmwood Avenue and Clover Street.

*Continued on Page 4*

# Riding the “Interurbans”

By J. E. Dierks

Until the development of the steam locomotive, we had three choices when we wanted to travel somewhere on land: our own two feet, an animal, or stay home. With the rapid growth of railroads across the country and around the world, more than our travel options changed. Now, we could afford to live farther from our place of work; we could visit distant friends and relatives who used to be weeks or even months away; and freight service brought hitherto unimaginable goods within easy availability. Rail technology transformed our lives.

2 But there was another technology lurking...electricity. A man who as a boy sold sandwiches on passenger trains and whose inventive mind led him to all sorts of creative ideas successfully tackled the need for artificial light. But when Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, his equally important development was the system for creating and distributing the electricity that powered it. From this system thinking came much more than electric lights.

Thirty years or so before Edison’s illuminating discovery, the basic railroad concept of flanged wheels on iron rails had found its way into city downtowns in the form of horse-drawn rail cars. These “horsecars” provided public transit along main thoroughfares and, as with the railroads, they made greater travel distances possible within the city, promoting expansion and economic growth. The many drawbacks of horse-powered transit included epidemics that decimated the roster of animals and the “contributions” the horses made to the pollution in the streets. It didn’t take long, once Edison’s generating plants were spinning and electric wires were strung, for clever entrepreneurs to envision streetcars powered not by horses but by electric motors.

In Rochester, the first electric streetcar service began in 1889. Bare wire strung over the street carried 600 volt direct current, and the car below was equipped with a spring-loaded pole at the top of which was a wheel to make electrical contact. The wheel riding along the wire gave rise to the name “trolley car”. As in other cities newly outfitted with these modern marvels, a new surge of expansion followed.

Trolley technology grew rapidly, with small 4-wheel streetcars soon replaced by larger 8-wheel cars with more powerful motors. While the size of streetcars was limited by available space in city streets, there were no such limits out in the open countryside. The “light bulb” went on in creative minds and by the turn of the last century the dawn of the interurban trolley era was soon upon us.

The word “interurban” comes from Latin and translates to “between cities”. The term was introduced by Charles Henry, founder of the Union Traction Company of Indiana, one of the largest networks of interurban trolley service with some 400 miles of line. Similar lines quickly took root throughout the eastern U.S., Midwest and around major urban areas elsewhere. The concept was simple: “steam roads” (railroads) involved high costs of equipment and crews, and generally served branch line customers with one or two trains a day. But trolley technology permitted railroad-size passenger cars to operate at fast speeds, with fewer crew members. Acceleration characteristics of electric power made it possible to serve smaller, “flag-stop” stations, and the cost advantage led to more frequent service, often with

trains running hourly throughout the day and evening. Electric power also eliminated the smoke, cinders, and noise of steam trains.

More than just another transportation choice, interurban service extended the possibilities for where people lived, worked, shopped and enjoyed leisure time. With automobiles still a novelty, interurban trolleys quickly became people's favorite mode for convenient and quick travel to more remote places. The earlier choice of either living in the city or languishing in a rural town far removed from city advantages was eliminated. Now, people could commute to city jobs, or travel to city shopping or business appointments and still be home for lunch. Access to better schools and medical care developed, and family members who could only afford to visit distant relatives annually could now drop by frequently. "Trolley suburbs" sprang up, and the characteristics of local commerce changed forever.

Investing in interurban trolley lines was the "dot com" era of a hundred years ago, as companies were formed over night, stock was sold, mergers and acquisitions spread, and interurban trolleys began rolling seemingly everywhere. Many lines interconnected, such that at one time an adventurous traveler could go from the eastern seaboard to the Midwest almost entirely by interurban.

Here in the Rochester area, lines were built to Syracuse, to Buffalo, to Sodus and to Geneva. Our area was well served by frequent, fast cars on these lines, cars that were richly appointed inside and of graceful proportion on their exteriors. As elsewhere, these lines transformed the way we lived.

The interurban era lasted through the 1920s, struggling against increasing competition from the



*Rochester & Eastern 163 poses in fresh yellow and cream paint in the 1920s...a more modern image and safer at grade crossings..*

private automobile as cars became more accessible to the average citizen and roads were accordingly improved. The last straw came with the onset of the Depression. Most lines filed for bankruptcy and the interurban wheels stopped rolling.

Today, the interurban era lives on only in memory and photo archives...and in a few museums run by dedicated volunteers. Rochester area

people are fortunate to have the New York Museum of Transportation in nearby Rush, NY, where the only trolley operation in New York State affords visitors the chance to relive this exciting time. Passengers board a big, 30-ton trolley car and it rumbles out across open fields and through shady woods. The clickety clack of the rails and the singing of the trolley wheel on the wire remind us of a different time in our history, a simpler time seasoned by the wonder of electric power and the revolution in mobility known as the interurban era. □

The New York Museum of Transportation is open year-round, Sundays only, and features New York State's only electric trolley rides. In addition to the rides, the museum contains numerous vehicles and exhibits of photos, smaller transportation artifacts, and a large operating model railroad. Admission also includes a visit to the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum with its century-old country station and collection of diesel locomotives, railroad cars, and exhibits.

Entrance for the combined experience is at 6393 East River Road (I-390 exit 11, NY Rt. 251 West, then 1 mile north on East River Road). Admission is \$7 adults, \$6 seniors over 65, and \$5 students 3 through 15. (585) 533-1113. [www.nytmuseum.org](http://www.nytmuseum.org)

Blowing up the canal lock opens the new subway. Mayor Van Zandt and a group of engineers stand on the tumbled stones of a Brighton canal lock. The lock was dynamited to allow the Interurban railroad cars to enter Rochester via the new subway. Pictured, from left to right: John A. O'Connor, chief engineer; C. Arthur Poole, city engineer; Albert Flannery of the Rochester Union & Advertiser; Edwin A. Fisher, engineer; Henry White, vice-president of I. M. Ludington's Sons, general contractors for the subway project; W. H. Roberts, chief engineer of subway construction; and Mayor Clarence D. Van Zandt.



From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center, Rochester, N.Y.

#### *Historic Brighton Photographs at Grinnell's — Continued from Page 1*

Brighton Village at what is now the corner of East Avenue and Winton Road was a thriving place on the Erie Canal. William Bloss' tavern on the southeast corner of the intersection served "canawlers" as well as the general public. Bloss later espoused temperance and took advantage of the canal's proximity to empty his barrels of whisky.

The local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union built a fine hall on East Avenue in 1894. The village government of Brighton rented space in the WCTU hall until the annexation of the village by the city in 1905. With an altered front facade, the building still stands. Residents may remember it as the home of LaMay's drug store and later the location of Lowenguth Realty.

Across the street from the WCTU hall is the Brighton Presbyterian Church founded in 1817 in Orringh Stone's tavern. Located in Brighton Cemetery, the first church burned in 1867. The "new" church on East Avenue was replaced by the present edifice in 1927.

Thomas Caley's 1840 blacksmith shop at the northwest corner of East Avenue and Winton Road evolved into a carriage factory and later an automobile chassis factory in the twentieth century. John Nash joined as a partner in the 1880s. A photograph shows a collection of their vehicles in the late nineteenth century. Two other photographs show Caley & Nash in 1935 and 1950.

The Twelve Corners became the town's unofficial village after the annexation of Brighton in 1905. The Rochester Brick and Tile works (1853 to 1919), a tavern, and blacksmith shop constituted the commercial architecture. The addition of the interurban trolley along Monroe Avenue and the development of housing impelled the founding of additional businesses. The collection at Grinnell's shows the Schrieb Hotel in 1895. The hotel later became Leary Brothers. Nearby, in the center of the triangle, stood a blacksmith shop. Horses and smithies appear in a photo beneath a large elm tree.

Another Twelve Corners business was the hotel operated by Albert Michels on the northwest corner of Monroe Avenue and Winton Road. The Chateau had an interesting reputation. It was replaced by a gas station. □



# Contents of Edmunds Diaries —

## Edmunds Farm and Family

By Leo Dodd

I hope I can make this complicated story painless to read. We have uncovered so much information on the Edmunds Farm that reducing it to a short, understandable and coherent story is indeed a challenge. I have recounted the acquisition of the forty hand- written diaries that detailed the daily life on the Clinton Avenue and Westfall Road farm.



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Well now we have a photo story to complement that history. We have been given family photos of several of the main characters described in the Diaries. We have “Day Book” records that James Madison Edmunds, (Patriarch of the family) wrote in 1839. We have recorded stories as told by “Great Aunt Sue”, the hand written diaries of James Polk Edmunds Sr. and James Polk Edmunds Jr. and the related diary stories that include Anderica wife to James Polk Edmunds Sr.

We don’t have to create imaginary images of these people...we have The Edmunds family photos, thanks to George Eastman and other photographic inventors of the nineteenth century.

### E d m u n d s   F a m i l y



James Madison 1809-  
1902

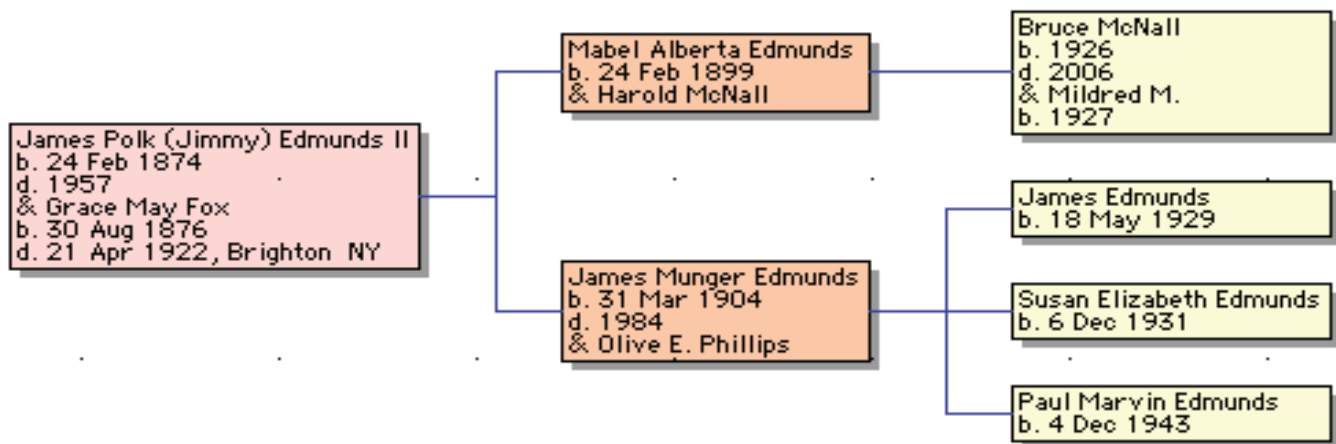
Roxanne (Sue)  
1839-1924

James Polk 1844-  
1906

Anderica (Dike) 1848-  
1915

James Polk II 1874-  
1957

The photographs arrived through the efforts of several people. Joan Updaw, a member of Historic Brighton, a neighbor of mine and a former resident of a Westfall Farm, put me in contact with Mildred McNall and Mildred expanded our introduction to Susan and James Edmunds. The descendent chart below explains the relationship of all involved.



James Munger Edmunds, (listed above), an English Professor at Brockport State College from 1937 to 1971, was extremely interested in local history. Writing in the “New York Folklore Quarterly of Autumn 1957, he praised the family history stories relayed by his great aunt Roxanne, (pictured above). He wrote the following; *“In the first half of this article I have tried to recall vague memories of my own childhood, stories learned from Aunt Sue—that rather than Roxanna was the name by which her family knew her. The stories told of the family move to Brighton Township in Monroe County and of how life was lived there in the first half of the last century. Nearly a half century separates me from the telling, and accurate detail can never be recalled. In the second half I have given what I or my students have found of still available, though up to now unused materials for a reconstruction of the past. Surely, if searchers look hard enough in attics and old trunks, a much richer picture of how our ancestors lived can be preserved.”*

Oh what a happy man he would be if he could have read his father’s diaries as have we. His history interest was shared by his family and we are deeply indebted to, Mildred, Susan and James for sharing the following photos and the stories they have related. {My observation: The Edmunds of old seem to have been averse to paint for none of the farm buildings or house, (photos taken in ~1915), seem ever to have been painted. I thought all barns were painted red and houses white!}

Now how complete a story could you wish for, family photos taken in the 1800’s, hand written diaries from 1871-1902, family oral history and now photo records of the farm activity.....gollyeeeeeee!

May we do justice to the history treasure, given by the Edmunds family and others. □





Farm House



Carriage House



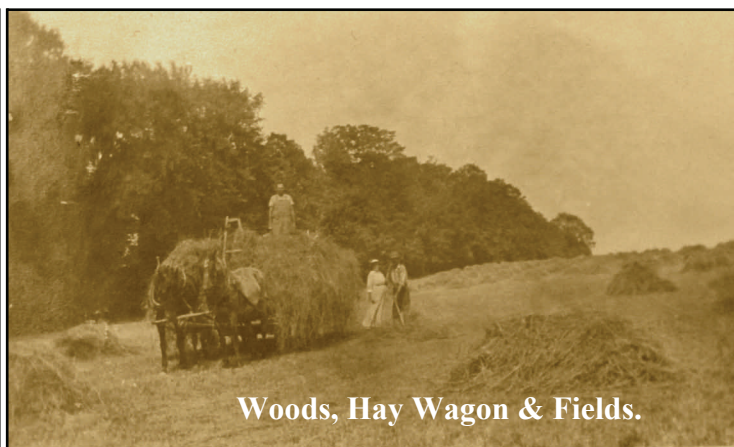
Barnyard & Cow



Barn & Orchard



3 Out Buildings



Woods, Hay Wagon & Fields.

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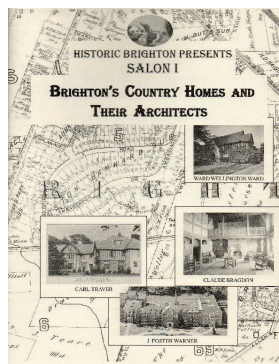
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