

Gideon Cobb's Hill

Gideon Cobb (1791-1864) arrived in the Genesee Country just after the War of 1812, according to Orsamus Turner. This was the frontier. Brighton was about to be established as a town in 1814. The village of Rochester had a few inhabitants on the west side of the river in the town of Gates. Mr. Cobb was an enterprising young man who took on a series of occupations, e.g., he was a peddler of scythes and axes, a traveling dealer in hollow ware, a conveyer of people and goods from Rochesterville to the Genesee river. He also cleared the woods on North Street and Monroe Avenue. By 1817 he had accumulated enough money to purchase, with his brother William, seventy acres in lot 37 in Brighton, part of the area that is now the Home Acres tract. Nine years later Gideon bought eleven and a half acres in lot 36, the land containing the hill that bears his name. By then he had begun the brickmaking business that would occupy his land and his attention for many years to come. During his life time he built of bricks a twenty-two room house and tavern on Monroe and Highland Avenues.

As early as 1891 the city of Rochester began planning a reservoir for the top of Cobb's Hill in Brighton. The reservoir at Highland Park, constructed in 1875, with a capacity of 26 million gallons, was deemed insufficient to meet the needs of the growing community, according to a New York City civil engineer hired by city's common council.

The 1905 annexation of the village of Brighton brought the 21st ward to the city, initiating a growth spurt that doubled the size of the city from 1905 to 1926. The bonus addition in 1905 was the land on top of Cobb's Hill, near but not contingent to the village.

Cobb's Hill, at 663 feet above sea level, would provide the needed storage of water piped from the reservoir at Rush that stored water from Hemlock and Canadice Lakes. Although the civil engineer did opine that a reservoir on the west side of the city would be preferable, city planners decided to add a second reservoir on the east side.

On July 20, 1905, Denniston & Company was awarded the contract for the construction of the reservoir. Once the digging of the basin was completed, it was lined with six inches of concrete. Over this went a weatherproofing layer of tar paper then the final layer of twelve-inch concrete blocks, their joints filled with tar. Work was completed in in 1908 and the basin was filled with water by the end of that year. According to plan, six months after completion and watering, the reservoir was emptied into the east side trunk sewer. Debris that had settled to the bottom was removed and the basin refilled with its capacity of 144 million gallons of water.

In 1908 George Eastman's donation of fifteen acres of land at Culver Road and Monroe Avenue spurred the creation of Cobb's Hill Park on the acreage around the hill. The Frederick Law Olmsted company provided the landscape design for the hill and the surrounding park.

Cobb's Hill today still provides water storage for the city and surrounding communities as well as offering a picturesque site for walking and parking. And it still bears the name of Gideon Cobb, Brighton pioneer.

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