



# HISTORIC BRIGHTON NEWS

VOLUME 7

FALL 2006

NUMBER 4

## *Come ride the Rochester Subway again!*

with

Jim Dierks

New York Museum of Transportation

Sunday, October 22

3 PM

Brighton Fire Dept # 1

3100 East Avenue (at Linden)



*Subway turnout at Rowlands in Brighton*



*Opening day of the subway in 1924*



*Subway near East Avenue*



*Subway car approaching Rowlands*

Jim Dierks will discuss transportation history in general, segueing into slides with narration showing the Rochester subway over the course of its life. There will be photos of converting the Erie Canal to subway use, and lots of pictures showing the subway in operation. He also has a short 8mm movie (never shown to the public before) depicting the subway in its last days, and will tell you all about a surprising find that was recently donated. The images in the slide talk are from the Tom Kirm Collection at the New York Museum of Transportation.

Dierks was raised in a suburb of Chicago, coming to Rochester in 1963 after graduating from Cornell University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. He spent 28 years at Kodak in the camera business—in both design and management positions (including four years in Brazil and two in Japan). He retired in 1991, at the age of 51. That has allowed him to indulge his major interest in all aspects of running an all-volunteer museum. Dierks has been a trustee of the New York Museum of Transportation for more than 26 years and is currently secretary of the board of trustees. In his spare time, he tries to keep his old house in the city looking good, and occasionally takes his 1927 Buick touring car for a spin around town.

**HISTORIC BRIGHTON ADDRESS**

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ROCHESTER, NEW YORK 14618

**WEBSITE: [www.historicbrighton.org](http://www.historicbrighton.org)**

*Photos courtesy Rochester Public Library  
Local History Division*

# East Avenue Memories

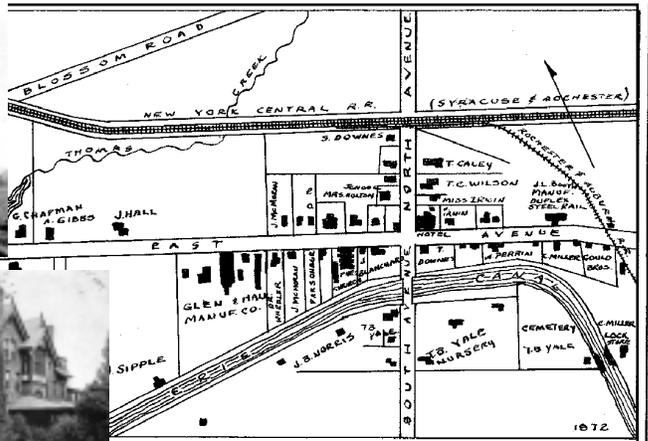
- HISTORIC BRIGHTON IS PUBLISHING A SPECIAL EDITION OF A NOSTALGIC SCRAPBOOK OF MEMORIES LIMITED TO 200 COPIES SIGNED AND NUMBERED. THE MEMORIES ARE TAKEN FROM THE 200 YEARS OF EAST AVENUE HISTORY.
- MANY PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY RESERVED A COPY OF THIS BOOK. IT WILL BE PRINTED IN JANUARY 2007 AND AVAILABLE AT THE HISTORIC BRIGHTON ANNUAL MEETING OF JANUARY 28<sup>TH</sup>. (SAMPLE BOOKS WERE ON VIEW AT THE CLOTHESLINE ART FESTIVAL IN SEPTEMBER.)
- SAMPLE COPIES OF THE BOOK WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PERUSAL AT THE OCTOBER 22, 2006 MEETING OF HISTORIC BRIGHTON AT THE EAST AVENUE FIREHOUSE.
- A COUPON IS AVAILABLE ON PAGE 4 OF THIS NEWSLETTER TO RESERVE YOUR COPY (OR COPIES)
- SOME OF THE PEOPLE AND PLACES YOU WILL MEET IN HISTORIC BRIGHTON'S NEW PUBLICATION ARE FOUND ON THESE TWO PAGES

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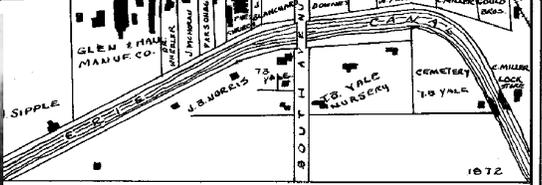




REV. ANDREW H. CONROY, D.D., L.S.R.  
BISHOP OF SYRACUSE



ANNE ROSE DE BERRY  
MARRIED TO THE BISHOP



# Rhees Library, City Bells Toll Eastman Dirge

Bells reserved for only the most unusual occasions today tolled a parting benediction for George Eastman.

At high noon the center bell of the huge chimes in the tower of Rhea's Library on the River Campus of the University of Rochester was sounded reverently.

The last time this bell was rung for a citizen was in June, 1918, at the death of George Eastman.

opened in St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the old fire bell in City Hall tolled out the years lived by this city's benefactor.

The last time this bell was rung for a citizen was in June, 1918, at the death of George Eastman.





# HISTORIC BRIGHTON

PRESENTS

## East Avenue Memories

- An elegant 160-page scrapbook of nostalgic photographs and text
- Compiled and written by Elizabeth Brayer with contributions by Mary Jo Lanphear and Leo Dodd
- This limited edition publication relays a charming informal 200-year history of Rochester, Brighton, and Pittsford's important East Avenue. Characters who enter this saga range from Aaron Erickson to George Eastman, from art museum founder Emily Sibley Watson to nurseryman James Vick, from aqueduct engineer Josiah Bissell, who named East Avenue, to temperance advocate and abolitionist William Bloss, who dumped his Brighton tavern's liquor into the Erie Canal.
- Hand-sewn binding by Soleil Bookbindery Standard edition features bark and cloth cover. Deluxe edition features bark and leather.
- For more information, call 244-0402.

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Celebrating our town's history and educating our community about Brighton's past

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## East Avenue Memories

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# FOCUS ON MEADOWBROOK

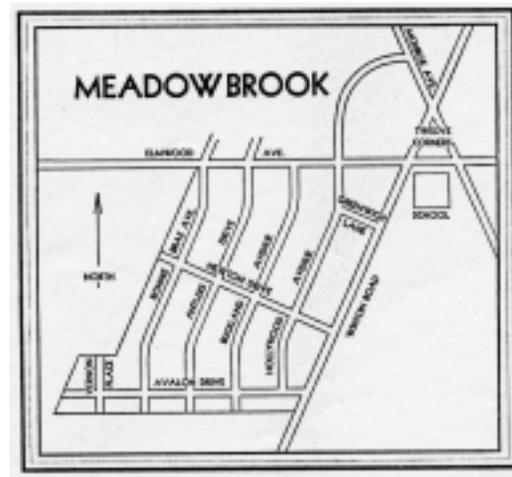
**I**n 2001, the Meadowbrook Neighborhood Association celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At that time, Robyn Schaefer, a resident of Meadowbrook, wrote, compiled, and published a booklet entitled *98 Acres: The Story of Meadowbrook, Brighton, NY*. Earlier issues of *Historic Brighton News* published early chapters of that history. (Check out vol. 3 no. 2, Fall 2002 and vol. 4 no. 1, Winter 2003). In this issue, we resume publication of two more chapters. The first chapter, “Why Is It Called The Dandelion?,” is about Meadowbrook’s long-standing newsletter. The second is the chapter about that terrible day in 1951, “Black Friday,” when gas explosions rocked several Brighton neighborhoods.

## “WHY IS IT CALLED THE DANDELION?”

By Robyn Schaefer

**O**ur neighborhood newsletter, the “Meadowbrook Dandelion,” made its first appearance in May of 1933. It was published monthly for the residents of Meadowbrook for the purpose of “conveying news of personal interest and community activity.” The position of editor of the “Dandelion” was handed over every couple of years, but the first was Charles L. Rumrill. A fine artist named Driscoll made the charming and clever drawings used on the cover of the newsletter in its early years. According to the forward in the first issue, the Dandelion was named as a joke to “honor” the weed that was a steady nuisance to frustrated homeowners. The desire for a lush, green lawn to enhance their beautiful new homes was hampered by the relentless problem of an over-whelming amount of dandelions. So much so, that a humorous article was written in the June 1934 issue about this matter. It warns newcomers to Meadowbrook, “not to be faint of heart. Many have traveled the weary trail before you. Be of good cheer. Dig, dope and hope.”

The first Dandelion was four pages long, including the cover. Its contents consisted of a list of current officers and directors, announcements of upcoming social events, a treasurer’s report and the section known as the Dandelion Juice. The Dandelion Juice contained little pieces of news about neighbors that others might find interesting. It was basically a social column announcing news such as which neighbors became new members of a golf club, or which had recently screened in their porches. News of who painted their house, or who bought a new car, or perhaps where a neighbor might be vacationing for one holiday or another, filled the column. In the “Juice”, births were announced, illnesses were listed and deaths reported, along with neighbors moving in and neighbors moving out.



A committee was appointed in 1935, often women whose mission was to contact all residents on their block and collect any items of interest to be delivered to the editor each month. This section became so popular that by the early forties the column had grown from just a few entries to six pages long! It was then renamed, “Our Busy Little World.” Obviously not every neighbor could contribute fascinating news, but they did their best to provide something. Mr. and Mrs. Fitch of Antlers Drive shared news of the family entertaining informally at bridge and ping pong on Saturday evening at their home in an April 1941 issue of the Dandelion. The Grahams of Vemon Place. “. . . recently dressed up their already good-looking house with the addition of awnings.” Another entry announced that a young resident of Avalon Drive was at Girl Scout Camp in Sodus. Entries of this sort were typical of the column, and while seeming only vaguely interesting to today’s reader, they do paint a picture of a time gone by and exude the spirit and social attitudes of intelligent and good-natured individuals that made Meadowbrook a unique neighborhood experience.

## “WHY IS IT CALLED THE DANDELION?”

Due to the thoughtfulness and foresight of the Association, in 1985 a collection of Meadowbrook Dandelions from 1933 to 1980 was given to the Brighton Memorial Library. It was intended to keep them at the library so the collection would remain together and safe. The library’s director considered them a valuable addition to the Local History Department. The importance of the collection is apparent in the volumes of information that provide names and happenings of our earliest residents as a detailed historical record of neighborhood life.

Reading through past copies of the Dandelion, a variety of information is discovered that relates to the times. In May of 1944, the Dandelion was reduced to only one page to conserve paper for the war effort. Government orders! An article in the same issue stressed the importance of V-mail to the GIs who read their mail even before eating. The July 1944 issue listed all the men from Meadowbrook who were in the Armed Services. The December 1945 issue reported that wartime building slowed in Meadowbrook due to unstable and unavailable materials. Another article describes a tradition in the 1940s and 50s of setting candles in every window on Christmas Eve. Visitors would come in from the city and other neighborhoods to drive through Meadowbrook and view the wondrous sight. The article informed neighbors that “...new electrical candles were now available in stores at Twelve Corners which would prevent accidents.” In the spring of 1971, it was written in the Dandelion that the Dutch elm disease had taken many of Meadowbrook’s curbside trees. It said that the tract, unfortunately, resembled photos taken in the 1930s. Efforts to replace the elms continued through the mid-seventies.

The Meadowbrook Dandelion’s format changed often through its 68-year history. The Dandelion of today doesn’t include a social column as it did in its youth. It has, however, developed into an attractive and highly informative newsletter, aimed at providing Meadowbrook neighbors with pertinent information that may affect them directly. It introduces our newest neighbors, those who move into our area and those who are born in Meadowbrook. The Dandelion also serves as an important link between the association’s directors and neighborhood residents. The Meadowbrook Dandelion is well received several times a year and the neighbors look forward to its arrival.



## BLACK FRIDAY IN MEADOWBROOK



By Robyn Schaefer

**S**EPTEMBER 21, 1951 WAS THE TERRIBLE day. The lives of two Meadowbrook children were lost in what was called the “Brighton Blast.” Eight-year-old Mary Anne Maas and her five-year-old brother William died when their Buckland Avenue home exploded on that quiet Friday afternoon.

On that day, known as Black Friday, fifteen homes were completely destroyed, sixteen others were seriously damaged, and twenty-three were damaged by fire or flying debris in the neighborhoods surrounding Twelve Corners.

An underground vault located at Twelve Corners housed natural gas regulators. No one was working in the vault at the time, although nearby there were men repairing a section of sidewalk outside the Chateau Restaurant, at Winton Road and Monroe Avenue. The men repairing the sidewalk had completed their work, lighted flares for the night and were leaving the job when the vault exploded. It was believed that the flares touched off a gas leak within the nearby vault. A manhole cover on the vault was blown into the air. As it fell, it struck the regulator mechanism forcing it into an “open” position, which sent excessive gas pressure into homes in the immediate area.

The gas reached the homes with such high pressure that it caused pilot lights on stoves to shoot eight inches into the air. For people who were home, this was an alarming indication that something was very wrong. Others felt the furnace go on and became puzzled since it was a warm, sunny day. Except for a sudden, intense hiss of gas, there was no warning of the series of explosions that destroyed homes, started fires, killed three, and injured at least 38 people in the neighborhoods of Roselawn, Bel Air and

# BLACK FRIDAY IN MEADOWBROOK



Meadowbrook. Homes exploded on Sylvan Road, Antlers Drive, Meredith Street, Fair Oaks Avenue and Seneca Drive in the Roselawn section. There were explosions at homes on Oakdale Drive, Glen Ellen Way, Varinna Drive and Mayflower Drive in the Bel Air neighborhood. In Meadowbrook, two houses on Bonnie Brae Avenue and one on Buckland Avenue were leveled. Mrs. Louis A. Meyer of 41 Antlers Drive, who was seventy-seven years old, died of a heart attack as she and her daughter tried to escape the devastation walking to Twelve Corners.

Rochester's Democrat and Chronicle newspaper accounts of the catastrophe describe the neighbors' immediate reactions as shock, fear, and utter confusion. Initially, no one knew why the houses around them were randomly exploding. It soon became apparent that the gas valves should be turned off and several heroic neighbors risked danger entering as many homes as they could, running to the basement with a wrench in hand.

An aerial photograph taken about a half hour after the first explosion in Meadowbrook shows six houses aflame, sending up heavy clouds of smoke that darkened the sky. Local hotels filled with people whose homes were damaged or destroyed. Most residents left the area until they felt secure in returning later that weekend. Neighbors, such as David Leavitt, remember standing guard on the night watch at the roadblock at the corner of Avalon Drive and Winton Road. Meadowbrook residents teamed up with Civil Defense disaster crewmen and the National Guard to spray water hoses and shovel rubble, and to prevent vandals from entering abandoned houses. State police,

local police and volunteers from all over Monroe County and beyond were called upon for their assistance. The Red Cross sent workers to help with emergencies at Twelve Corners where a tent was erected to administer first aid for burns, cuts, and smoke inhalation. At the Brighton Town Hall, members of the American Legion helped distribute food and supplies donated by area businesses, restaurants, and bakeries to feed the workers and victims of the disaster. Ministers, priests and rabbis roamed through the district offering consolation and aid to families driven from their homes.

Unauthorized traffic was barred in Brighton in an attempt to prevent on-lookers from entering the area. Roadblocks were set up at the intersection of Monroe Avenue and Culver Road: drivers were warned to stay away. Regardless, cars lined the surrounding streets trying to get a glimpse of the devastation, merely causing dangerous traffic congestion.

Late the next day, loudspeaker trucks announced that people could return to their homes. RG&E instructed the owners of 1,400 houses in the blast zone comprising the section bounded by Highland Avenue, Winton Road, Avalon Drive and Westland Avenue to leave the gas off until further notice and to open all doors and windows. No additional fires were reported.

Alexander M. Beebee, the president of Rochester Gas and Electric, expressed his company's "... deepest sympathy for the bereavement, suffering, sorrow and inconvenience that has been brought to some of our customers by this unfortunate accident." Though, sadly, three lives

## BLACK FRIDAY IN MEADOWBROOK

were lost, there was also a “miracle of timing” that occurred. Friday afternoon was traditionally a shopping day for many housewives and, because it was a pleasant day, many people were out doors. With men at work and most children at school during the daytime, not many people were in their homes. No one wanted to think about what would have happened had the catastrophe occurred at nighttime or even the next day.

Person who lived through this tragedy have their own stories to tell. For every account of injury, fear and horror there seems to be a story of a narrow escape or of an act of heroism.



*Meadowbrook in the early 1930s*

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*Meadowbrook*

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*Page from Meadowbrook sales brochure*

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