



HISTORIC BRIGHTON NEWS

VOLUME 6

WINTER 2005

NUMBER 1

Annual Meeting February 6 features Landmark Society's Henry McCartney 'WHY HISTORIC PRESERVATION IS VITAL TO OUR FUTURE'



Henry McCartney

Historic Brighton's Annual Meeting will be held on February 6, 2 p.m., at the Brighton Town Hall, 2300 Elmwood Avenue, in the main auditorium. The meeting will feature a talk by Landmark Society Executive Di-

rector Henry McCartney on **Why Historic Preservation is Vital to Our Future.**

Henry McCartney has been Executive Director of the Landmark Society of Western New York since 1984 and has been involved in the historic preservation movement for over thirty years.

The Landmark Society, whose membership now exceeds 3,000, operates two house museums and an historic garden; publishes books on its region's culture and historic resources; sponsors a major heritage education program with area schools; and undertakes a wide variety of preservation ac-

tivities in Rochester, New York, and surrounding counties (including an 8-year effort to save the Roycroft Inn).

Previously, Henry was Director of Neighborhood Conservation at the National Trust (1978-84), where he initiated the Conserve Neighborhoods newsletter and developed the Inner-City Ventures Fund. He is also the former executive director of Riverside Avondale Preservation in Jacksonville, Florida. Henry has a BA from Tulane University and a Masters in City Planning from Georgia Tech. Henry and his wife, Sheila Appleby, have two children.

1

Thanks to



REED EYE
ASSOCIATES

for sponsoring this issue of
Historic Brighton News



The spring issue will include stories and photos of the historic Drescher house and garden, a Brighton landmark being renovated by Dr. Ronald Reed.

HISTORIC BRIGHTON
FOUNDED 1999

Arlene A. Wright, President
Maureen Holtzman, Vice-President
Janet Hopkin, Secretary
Patricia Aslin, Treasurer

Board of Directors
Elizabeth Brayer
Sheldon Brayer
Leo Dodd
Richard Dollinger
Suzanne Donahue
Monica Gilligan
Sally Harper
Hannelore Heyer
Josie Leyens
Darrell Norris
Dee Dee Teegarden
Catherine Zukosky

Betsy Brayer, Historic Brighton News editor
Mary Jo Lanphear, Town of Brighton Historian

CORBETT'S GLEN: TREASURED PAST, BRIGHT FUTURE



Charles Stoneburner built the original section of the home ca. 1880. The design of the house, with its large wrap-around porch, was common throughout Monroe County in this period. After 1890, Patrick Corbett added a commercial picnic facility that continued in use for more than 60 years.

Photos courtesy of "The Glen Gang" (Debbie Bower, Jeff Vincent and Scott Wagner).

By Catherine Zukosky

2

The life story of Corbett's Glen is one of drama and variety. Human activities have shaped and transformed it over almost four hundred years of known history. First a hunting and fishing ground and haven for Native Americans, it was intruded upon by European explorers and traders, then by pioneer settlers bringing industry and agriculture. In time it became a place for public gathering and recreation. Pollution of the creek's waters and controversy over the land's appropriate use brought the Glen to a condition of neglect and disuse. With its establishment by the Town of Brighton in 1999 as a Nature Park, it comes round again to a secluded and beautiful natural site, close to its original state and graced by the presence of the Corbett homestead, designated a landmark by Brighton Historic Preservation Commission in 1996.

You will find Corbett's Glen nestled in the Allen's Creek Valley, hidden behind thick trees near Interstate 490 and Rt. 441. The stream (originally named Allyn's Creek after early settler Timothy Allyn) is the largest tributary of Irondequoit Creek. With a length of approximately nine miles, it rises in Henrietta and flows northeast through Brighton,

descending 365 feet in a series of falls and rapids over underlying dolomite to its meeting with Irondequoit Creek. It was born when the last glacier retreated, leaving behind huge quantities of boulders, stones, sand and gravel. These massive deposits obstructed the course of a previously large river, causing that flow to move westward, while within the glacial debris small streams formed, seeking a way to Lake Ontario. Slowly, vegetation advanced upward from the south and the creekside areas became heavily wooded, creating a hospitable habitat for wildlife and for migrating humans who appeared here about 1500 years ago. The first were of the Algonkin tribe, which was supplanted by the Seneca Nation of the Iroquois. The Indian peoples lived in small settlements along the creeks, where beaver dams created small ponds and where fresh water, game and fish were abundant. Trout and salmon spawned in its pools. The natives traversed Irondequoit Creek and Allen's Creek in their canoes as far as the rapids and falls would permit, and created a network of footpaths through the Glen and in all directions, one west to the Genesee River and others south to several Seneca villages.

CORBETT'S GLEN: TREASURED PAST, BRIGHT FUTURE



The rustic bridge across the creek was washed away in 1942.

The glen on Allen's Creek emerged into recorded history with the arrival in the 16th century of French explorers. Fur traders soon followed, eager to acquire beaver and muskrat pelts in exchange for tools, firearms, gunpowder and liquor. But by 1685 relations between the French traders and the Senecas had deteriorated. Resentful Indians attacked French settlements and the fur trade declined. In 1687 King Louis XIV dispatched the Marquis de Denonville to destroy three Seneca villages to the south. French forces debarked at Irondequoit Bay and a group proceeded south, some membersthrough Corbett's Glen, to the settlements near today's Victor, Honeoye Falls and Holcomb. Great damage was inflicted on all three villages but the French also suffered severe losses. Denonville's forces retreated under counterattack from the Senecas and their allies, again through the Allen's Creek Valley, and the mission was ultimately a failure, having earned the French the enmity of the Indians. As English traders moved into the area, forming alliances with the Iroquois nations, the influence of Britain increased. However, the ravages of European diseases, conflicts with advancing settlers, and finally Sullivan's destructive march against them in 1779 left the Indian population greatly diminished.

With the end of the American Revolution and the signing with the Senecas of the Treaty of Buffalo Creek in 1788, settlers from the coastal region

moved into western New York. The Irondequoit and Allen's Creek areas were divided into townships. By 1810 several roads made the area more accessible to settlement by small farmers. The valleys were especially desirable locations because the falls and rapids promised a source of waterpower. As newcomers cleared land for agriculture, a sawmill and a gristmill were built in the glen. A series of powder mills grew up along Allen's Creek, producing explosives for firearms and for excavation work. Over a period of several decades these were the scenes of frequent disasters, some fatal. It is said a crater may still be found in Corbett's Glen, remnant of an explosion at Marshfield Parson's powder mill in 1863.

The first owners of the glen acreage were members of the Tryon Company, who established Tryon City on Irondequoit Creek around the Indian Landing in 1797. In about 1816 Leonard Stoneburner, who had a well, an iron works and a blacksmith shop in Tryon, purchased 20 acres of land in the glen. He constructed a dwelling and tilled the land where he grew vegetables. His son, William Stoneburner, purchased additional land in the glen from Marshfield Parsons in 1849. Some referred to the family's holdings as Stoneburner's Glen. William is said to have been active in the War of 1812, when he ran boats with food and supplies to American forces through the enemy blockade on

CORBETT'S GLEN: TREASURED PAST, BRIGHT FUTURE



Patrick Corbett and young friends, ca.1917.

Lake Ontario. His property contained ammunition dumps to supply the war effort. After the war, according to some sources, Leonard “built a twenty-ton schooner, besides a number of smaller craft, and conducted a shipping business.” Charles Stoneburner, another of Leonard’s sons, began the house that stands on the property today in about 1880; the Corbett family made later additions and alterations. Foundation elements of an earlier house can still be found in the glen as well.

4 The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 had brought rapid growth and prosperity to Rochester, changing the drift of enterprise and business in the region. Growth in the less accessible creeks area slowed markedly. By 1860 most of the land in the valleys had been cleared for farming, and the forest trees were used to provide building materials and firewood. Agriculture became the primary activity, as vegetables, grain, hay and dairy products supplied the booming city close by. Presumably the Stoneburners were among those suppliers. They benefited also from the selection of their Glen as a site over which would pass the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad route from Syracuse to Rochester. In 1853 a wooden trestle was constructed over the Creek right through Stoneburner Glen, not far from the Parsons powder mill. The Stoneburners were well paid for the land and were allowed to continue with their farming. In 1863 a westbound train left the track and plunged into Stoneburner Glen, but the trestle survived until the onslaught of flood not long thereafter. Throughout the Civil War the railroad bridge and adjacent powder mills were carefully guarded by Union troops because of their

importance to the war effort.

Railroad activity increased greatly after the war, capturing from the canal most of the passenger traffic and an ever increasing share of freight. Lines of track were doubled and the roadbed enlarged. The old wooden trestle was replaced in 1882 by a vaulted stone arch and earthen embankment. The arch was fashioned of hand-hewn limestone blocks held in place within the arch by gravity. The tunnel it creates is about 30 feet high and 150 feet long. This is the arch under which we pass today, entering the nature park from Glen Road. The embankment effectively sequesters the Glen from nearby expressways and commercial activity.

The Stoneburners remained in the Glen until at least 1885, when they sold a portion of their holdings to George and Jane Ashton. In 1890, the Ashtons sold this property to Patrick Corbett, who two years later purchased the remaining Stoneburner land, for a total acquisition of about 30 acres. Corbett’s energy and imagination transformed a farm homestead into a dual-purpose enterprise.

Patrick Corbett described himself as a gardener in the state census of 1892. He and his wife Julia raised eight children on his farm, where he raised vegetables and fruits on land for which he invented an ingenious irrigation system using water from the creek to create a prosperous truck farm. He added to the existing house to suit his family’s needs, and soon entered into the life of the community. As the father of a large family he must have been concerned with their schooling; he soon became a trustee of the Allen’s Creek School. His commitment to that neighborhood school continued throughout his life.

Patrick appreciated the scenic interest of the glen and noticed its attractiveness to visitors who came to fish and swim in its waters and play and picnic under its welcoming trees. Families would come in horse drawn carriages, neighborhood children on foot or bicycles, even on skis. The Syracuse and Eastern trolley, and later buses, brought picnickers from the city to the Linden Road stop adjacent to the Glen. Early visitors recall paying a five-cent admission fee to “Grandma Corbett”, or dropping their coins in a can nailed to a fencepost. As work-

CORBETT'S GLEN: TREASURED PAST, BRIGHT FUTURE



The Corbett farmhouse at 139 Glen Road was designated an Historic Landmark in 1996 by the Brighton Historic Preservation Commission.

ing people acquired more leisure and more families owned automobiles, excursions to scenic outdoor areas became a popular form of recreation. Patrick Corbett capitalized on this trend to create a commercial picnic facility that continued in use for more than 60 years. He built food and beverage pavilions, picnic shelters, areas for dancing and music, and playing fields to be enjoyed for company outings, church picnics, social club gatherings, weddings and birthdays. Large groups made advance reservations and paid rental fees through "Grandma Corbett," making their own arrangements for the provision of food, music and games. Many of Rochester's most prominent companies brought their employees together in the Glen for annual picnics, among them Eastman Kodak, Gleason Works, Hickey-Freeman Company and Genesee Brewery. More than 900 people attended a 1927 picnic of the Brick Presbyterian Church. Several musical groups performed, and games and races went on all day. Congregants brought their own picnics but were furnished with treats and beverages. The East Rochester Piano Works entertained 700 people at a catered picnic in 1940. Such large gatherings were routine. A guest at a Genesee Brewery picnic recalls Allen's Creek merrily bubbling with beer foam frosting.

Throughout the Great Depression and World War II, Corbett's Glen maintained its popularity as a recreation destination. The family continued its operation after Patrick Corbett's death in 1936, when he bequeathed the Glen property to two sons,

William and Charles. However, inevitable changes led to its gradual decline. Postwar residential growth in the area brought pollution of the creek. In 1942, the rustic bridge across the creek was washed away. The facilities became prey to vandalism; the pavilions were destroyed. In 1956 Mary Corbett, widow of Charles, sold the picnic grounds, exclusive of her house and two acres surrounding it, to Mr. and Mrs. Howard Meath of Rochester. The next year the Brighton Zoning Board approved Meath's plan to operate a private summer day camp in the Glen for children ages 6 to 14. "Camp Hideaway" opened in 1961 at a time when life style changes brought many families to seek full-day summer programs for their children. The camp continued in operation for nine years. Evenings and weekends, the picnic grounds were still available for rent. This led to some friction between the Meath enterprise and its residential neighbors in the glen. An article in *The Times Union* on 11 July 1974, alerted readers to "Another Rock-Beer Blast Set in Corbett's Glen." After more than 100 years, explosive sounds were coming again from the glen! Brighton Police warned Meath that noisy situations would not be tolerated, but complaints continued and the town later that year ruled the facility off limits for rental parties. That same year, the town board rejected a proposal by a development company to build 240 apartments and townhouses on 19 acres of the Glen. At the time there was a strong movement in the community to acquire the site for a public park. The town explored options to ac-

CORBETT'S GLEN: TREASURED PAST, BRIGHT FUTURE



An old wooden trestle was replaced in 1882 by a vaulted stone arch that was fashioned of hand-hewn limestone blocks held in place by gravity. The tunnel is about 30 feet high and 150 feet long. The most immediate feature after emerging from the railroad tunnel is the “Postcard Falls,” beginning a cascade over limestone rock in a series of cataracts and rapids.

complete this but failed in its attempts to secure state and federal funding. There was growing uneasiness over the prospect of commercial and residential development in the glen.

6 In 1976, Mary Corbett sold her house to the Odabashians. At the same time the rest of the glen property went to a partnership known as the Brigadoon Corporation. Then in 1984, Debbie Bower, Jeff Vincent and Scott Wagner purchased the Corbett house and its immediate grounds from the Odabashians. Nevertheless, neighborhood residents continued to enjoy the natural environment of the Glen for some years thereafter, and it continued as a haven for wildlife: fish, mink, fox, deer, wild turkey, blue heron and 40 different bird species. There was a resurgence of original flora and fauna during the 1980s after the county’s Pure Waters Project restored the creek’s water quality. Meanwhile, an alliance of neighbors, environmental activists and local historians strengthened efforts to preserve the Glen and undeveloped land adjacent to it.

The Corbett farmhouse at 139 Glen Road was designated an Historic Landmark in 1996. Charles Stoneburner, beginning about 1880, had built the original section of the home. The design of the house, with its large wrap-around porch, was common throughout Monroe County in this period. Cynthia Howk, architectural research consultant for

the Landmark Society, describes it as “architecturally significant as a notable example of a late-19th-century, vernacular farmhouse with Queen Anne style details.... The exterior and interior of this house retain a high degree of historic design, materials and craftsmanship. With their turned, wood columns, spindled railing and decorative newel posts, the front and east entrance porches show the influence of the Queen Anne style.... Other exterior details that reflect this style are the gable windows with large center glass surrounded by smaller, square panes and the decorative oriel window. Retaining much of its historic floor plan, the interior features decorative chestnut moldings, beaded-board wainscoting, patterned metal hardware, paneled doors and a handsome front staircase with distinctive newel post, finial, and spindled railing.”

When the Corbett family took possession of the house in 1892 it became the center of their activities, as a residence and a headquarters for the operation of their farming and picnic grounds business. A 1 ½-story kitchen wing was added to the house in 1910, and two outbuildings were constructed at around that time. However, the structure and details of the house remain essentially the same as it appears in early photos.

In December 1998, the Brigadoon Corporation’s 18 acres were purchased by the Town of Brighton and renamed Corbett’s Glen Nature Park. The cost

CORBETT'S GLEN: TREASURED PAST, BRIGHT FUTURE



In the 21st century, the glen was the scene for a television special on the life of George Eastman. When Eastman took up photography as a hobby in 1877, the wet-plate process required not only a camera bigger than a breadbox but running water for mixing chemicals so that the photographer could immediately develop his glass plate in the field. Photos by Betsy Brayer.

was \$260,000, to which was added the sum of \$75,000 from the Genesee Land Trust, an environmental group devoted to the acquisition of open space in and around Monroe County. The park is available to all who seek recreation consistent with preservation of the Glen's natural beauty and quiet character. Visitors may enjoy hiking, bird watching, fishing, cross country skiing, painting, and meditation.

A Corbett's Glen Advisory Committee has produced a preliminary master plan for the park that describes the notable qualities of the environment. The most immediate feature after emerging from the railroad tunnel and passing the Corbett house is the "Postcard Falls," beginning a cascade over limestone rock in a series of cataracts and rapids. A viewing area here, a widened footpath, and the installation of a railing will enhance access for the visitor. Four ecological communities in different stages of succession have been identified, including a wetland—a shallow emergent marsh previously drained and under cultivation as recently as 1945. There is a community of hardwood trees of varied species, and a band of shrubs returning to formerly open farm fields and recreational fields. The fourth is an old field, consisting of meadows that represent the most eastward extension of the prairies that originally covered most of the Midwestern United States. These communities contain a very high diversity of native herbaceous plants,

which at present are threatened by at least 15 invasive species. A habitat management plan is being developed to counter this invasion and encourage ascendancy of native growth. The existing trails will be used; six are recommended for improvement and signage, while others will be closed.

There will be three entrances to the park: the primary entrance from Glen Road, where there is a parking area for vehicles along the road; and pedestrian entrances from Dale Road and Colonial Village Road. Informational signs will be posted, and benches installed in appropriate locations. Anything carried into the park must be carried out again. Further information and directions may be found at the Town of Brighton website.

In addition to the Town of Brighton, a number of organizations share interest in the appropriate development and care of the park. They are the Genesee Land Trust, the Allen's Creek/Corbett's Glen Preservation Group, and the Friends of Ahskwa Sanctuary, which plans to establish archives with the town library and the town historian. With such enthusiastic support, Corbett's Glen Nature Park is assured of a future as interesting and fruitful as its past.



Save the dates: **April 12** for **THE BICENTENNIAL OF EAST AVENUE** **June 24, 25, 26** for **GIDEON COBB DAYS**

Two hundred years ago, two pioneer Brightonians—Oliver Culver and Orringh Stone—blazed a road from Stone’s Tavern to the main falls of the Genesee. Until the 1830s, the entire road was in the Town of Brighton. In the 1840s, it was named East Avenue. Late in the 19th century it acquired the nickname “Avenue of Presidents” and remains to the present era the area’s symbolic and social gateway. The April meeting of Historic Brighton will celebrate this bicentennial along with the centennial of the avenue’s largest and most distinguished mansion—the George Eastman House. This PowerPoint presentation by Betsy Brayer will be held April 12 at 7:15 PM in the auditorium of the Brighton Town Hall.



Map of Brighton Village in 1872.

The second annual Gideon Cobb Days will celebrate the centennial of the transfer of Brighton Village, East Avenue and Winton Road, from the Town of Brighton to the City of Rochester.

History luncheon and lecture by Mary Jo Lanphear and Darrell Norris at Mario’s on Friday, June 24 .

Tours of Old Brighton Village and the Brighton Cemetery on Saturday, June 25.

Trolley tours of East Avenue (originally part of Brighton) on Sunday, June 26.

8

2004-2005 HISTORIC BRIGHTON MEMBERSHIP

Helen C. Aldridge, Richard N. & Patricia Aslin, Dennis & Barbara Asselin, Edward & Ruth Atwater, Bruce Bellwood, Phyllis Bentley, Michael Berg, Helen Berkeley, C. Blackwell, Sheldon & Elizabeth Brayer, David L. Brooke, William Brorein Jr., William & Laura Burleigh, Mary S. Burns, Peggy Weston Byrd, Margaret Carnall, Rome Celli, Mr. & Mrs. Elmer Cheney, Natalie & Richard Ciccone, Sarah S. Clapp, Alfred & Patricia Clark, David & Stephanie Clark, Christopher S. Clarke, Katharine Clark, Libby Clay, Frank & Meg Colgan, Sylvia Commins, Annemarie & Wade Cook, Mr. & Mrs. Samuel Cooper Jr., Sybil & Albert Craig, Mary Critikos, Paul & Doris Crough, James & Patricia Crowley, Ellen & Ira Current, Richard B. DeMallie Jr., Leo & Mary Dodd, Marylyn & Rick Dollinger, Suzanne Donahue, David & Mary Duncan, Scott & Dorothy Dunlap, Gloria A. Emmanuel, Maria L. Ernest, Elizabeth Forbes, Mary Alice Fournier, Melrose Franklin, Joanne & Robert Gianniny, Monica Gilligan, Lucius R. Gordon, Jessica Green, Elaine F. Greene, Kathleen Grenier, Dr. & Mrs. Donald Grinols, Frank & Diane Grosso, Mary B. Gulick, Sally Harper, John & Shirley Hart, Hannelore & Robert Heyer, Christopher & Joanna Hodgman, Maureen & Arthur Holtzman, Janet & Britten Hopkin, William & Cynthia Hosley, June & Conrad Houle, Peggy & Tom Hubbard, Gwyneth D. Hunting, Mr. & Mrs. Robert S. Hursh, Tom & Louise Kaneley, Tom & Louise Kanaley, Gary & Pamela Kimmel, Louise Klinke, Rose-Marie Klipstein, Mary E. Kunz, Thomas LaChiusa, Marlowe & David Laiacone, Mary Jo Lanphear, Leaded Glass Art, Mary C. & Teresa J. Leene, Nancy & Howard LeVant, Josie & Adam Leyens, James & Susan Locke, Jerry Ludwig, Gilbert G. & Katherine McCurdy, Sally McGucken, James & Roxanne. McNamara, Lynn & Stan Merrell, Suzanne Meyerowitz, Leon & Betty Miller, Carol & Tom Mullen, Susan F. Myers, Sarah Nernetz, Peggy Neville, Richard & Nancy Sanfilippo Newton, Cindi Noeth, Darrell A. Norris, Elaine & Harvey Nusbaum, Ingeborg & Gunter Oberdoerster, John Page, Janet Patlow, Kathy Pearce, David & Marjorie Perlman, Polly & Kirk Personius, Robert & Patricia Place, Jean H. Poppoon, Jay & Margaret Rachfal, Ronald Reed, Margaret & David Regan, Richard & Nancy Reitkopp, Mariana Rhoades, Dan & Nancy Robbins, Diana Robinson, Mary Roby, Judy Rosenburg, Herbert Ross, Claire B. Rubin, Pearl W. Rubin, Ray & Dandrea Ruhlmann, Margaret S. Ruth, Susan Satter, Peggy Savlov, Robyn Schaefer, Susan E. Schilling, Ono Lee Schlageter, Judy Schwartz, Gary L. & Diane Shirley, Lisa Smith, David & Elizabeth Stewart, Mary Kay & Bill Taber, Deedee & Ken Teegarden, David Troup, Nancy Uffindell, Joan Updaw, Derek Vanderlinde, Elizabeth & Timothy Wilder, William B. & Marion G. Wilmot, Carolyn Wolfe, Arlene A. Wright, George & Nancy Zimmer, Catherine Zukosky.