



# HISTORIC BRIGHTON

CELEBRATING OUR TOWN'S HISTORY AND  
EDUCATING OUR COMMUNITY ABOUT BRIGHTON'S PAST

VOLUME 16

SPRING 2015

NUMBER 2

## A PARKS CENTENNIAL SCRAPBOOK



### TOBOGGAN SLIDE

Ellison Park continued to attract people for winter activities as this toboggan slide did in 1917. The toboggan slide is no longer there, but the park offers ice skating, bridle and cross-country ski trails, hiking, softball fields, tennis courts and a playground.



The 447-acre county park also preserves the site of Peter Schuyler's Trading Post built near Indian Landing on Irondequoit Bay around 1721 as a fur trading post and recreated in 1938 as Fort Schuyler. Just west of the trading post, John Tyler founded Tyngden in 1797. This photograph is from the collection at the Rochester Public Library, Local History Division.

*The infamous toboggan slide at the end of Washington Drive*



*Lafayette Parkway in spring and winter*



*Chief Freeman Johnson (top) and his great-aunt Go-wat-ha (Nancy Black Squirrel)*

## STORIES OF ELLISON PARK HEIGHTS AND ITS PARK

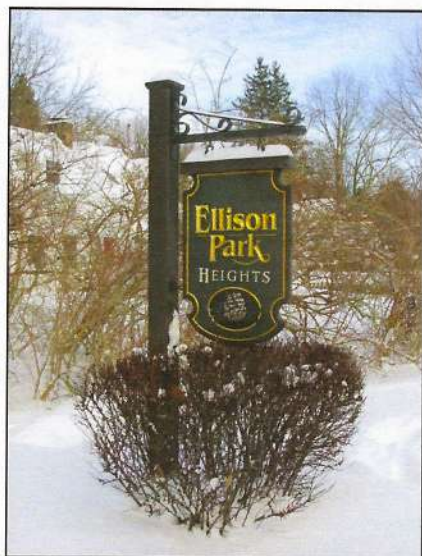
This issue of HBN is devoted to Ellison Park Heights, a model post-Depression suburban subdivision and to Ellison Park itself, the first and only county park in Brighton.

The story of Ellison Park Heights as told and illustrated by a 1952 document and updated by Ron Richardson, a resident since 1988, begins on page two and continues through page seven.

Then pages eight and nine feature an article by Lisa Klemen about the opening of the park in 1927. Lisa's great grandfather was Theodore Dossenbach, conductor of the justly famous Park Band that played in all of the parks to audiences that were dressed to the nines in their finest hats and white gloves. Theodore, however, had died in 1924 and his place at the 1927 Ellison Park opening was taken by his equally famous brother, Herman Dossenbach, conductor of the original nineteenth century Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, forerunner of our own RPO. The brothers also played weekly for George Eastman in the Dossenbach Quintette from the 1890s to about 1919.

Pages ten through thirteen of our journal features more about the park as written by Town of Brighton historian Mary Jo Lanphear. Pages fourteen and fifteen is devoted to SNOW: contrasting photos of Ellison Park Heights taken during this cold and snowy winter with a shot of Cromwell Drive in March of 1960.

The land on which Ellison Park is situated is one of the most historic in western New York, indeed North America. Here the Iroquois Senecas began their portage route to the Great Lakes and Mississippi River. Here the two-hundred year Game of Empire between France and England played out and famous explorers like LaSalle and Father Hennepin came ashore, with the latter building a bark chapel where Mercy High school would rise. Here Butler's Rangers encamped before sprinting to Niagara-on-the-Lake and Sullivan's army devastated all yet his soldiers returned to farm the rich soil of the Genesee Valley. Page sixteen is a reprieve for Ellison Park Heights with fourteen Richardson photos of houses as seen this year and a page from the original brochure.



## ELLISON PARK HEIGHTS

*A MODEL FOR POST-DEPRESSION SUBURBAN "SUB-DIVISIONS"*

2

As automobiles offered people a considerably more independent form of transportation, along with major improvements to the lawnmower after its invention in 1830, many Rochesterians with some means began to move farther out from the city center.

They settled away from the increasingly crowded area around the Genesee River and the Erie Canal to larger plots of land and grassy lawns, beyond what was then the city limits, eastward into what was originally Brighton.

One of the most notable of these early "sub-urb" enclaves east of the city center were those of the Hiram Sibley and Don Alonzo Watson families, with their residential compounds built on and around the "Pittsford Road." Later named "East Avenue," that example was supported by George Eastman when he built his extensive home and farm-like estate further in that direction.

By the 1920s, still farther to the east of the Genesee River, and into Brighton, that area was now becoming a very actively burgeoning, and affluent area, with developments such as the Houston Barnard Tract off of East Avenue.

That included streets such as Pelham Road, Grosvenor Road, and extending over to streets such as Ambassador Drive, and Sandringham Road — homes built out of the city but convenient to downtown Rochester — for families of considerable wealth prior to the Great Depression.

**By the later 1930s, when the "middle class" of Rochester began to feel more comfortable with reasonable prosperity as the economy improved, there was a renewal of development in Brighton.**

**With some less monumental homes, but with some of the same sense of design, and with the many of the same Pre-World War II craftsmen, contractors, and materials available, were built more "sub-division" neighborhoods in Brighton.**

**One of the first areas to have infrastructure developed for a such a residential development was called "Ellison Park Heights."**

On land purchased which had been pastureland for the Welkley family dairy farm — one of several dairy businesses active at that time along Penfield Road — a clever

design was arrived at by the developers of Ellison Park Heights.

The developers built a racetrack-like oval of two streets (Commodore and Lafayette Parkways), surrounded by many lots with ample yards, some adjacent to Ellison Park, along with several side streets with homes that backed up to scenic views of the wooded and bucolic glacial ravines also leading to the park.

The land and infrastructure developer did not determine the particular way in which the homes were built. Each buyer of these real estate lots were to determine their own architects and contractors. This resulted in a varied, yet compatible, group of homes of various sizes and designs... and remain today recognizable examples of several styles of interest during that period.

Many of the homes are still much in their original condition — quite fortunately — most with their original cedar shingle, masonry, stucco, or wood clapboard cladding.

Those who lived here in the 1930s and 1940s might find very few noticeable alterations to their homes as they appear today.

Salesman

Chas. F. Rebscher  
Gen. 16

PHONE STONE 4206

A COMPLETE



REALTY SERVICE

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

It Started  
Fifty Thousand  
Years Ago.

It was about fifty thousand years ago that a billion-ton glacier played a game of hide and seek around what is now our upper Irondequoit Bay country. What a grand time it must have had is now recorded in a vast array of steep hills, ravines, sparkling streams, wooded promontories.

It is on the very crest of one of these promontories that a busy community is today developing. Residents here enjoy every modern living convenience combined with a view of one of the most interesting scenic areas in this country. Lots in many instances extend into heavily wooded ravines. From any point in this subdivision it is but a few minutes walk to tennis courts, baseball diamonds, a toboggan slide and a delightful system of bridle paths. These are but a few of the attractions that will make you "in love" with Ellison Park Heights.

Your home in this section is only twenty minutes from downtown Rochester. Well paved streets bordered by tall elms mark your approach along both Penfield Road and East Avenue. All improvements are in and paid for. Taxes will be less than \$80 per year (average home). There is an excellent grade school within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. The Brighton High School bus stops at the Penfield Road entrance.

Homes in Ellison Park Heights complete with lot and improvements may be built for as low as \$5390. F.H.A. low down payments and long term financing are available. You will be assisted in your home building, whether it be a small home or a mansion, by architect's plans, advice in the selection of a good builder, and assistance in securing the necessary loans ---through the ABCO Realty offices at 43 Franklin Street.

Sincerely yours,

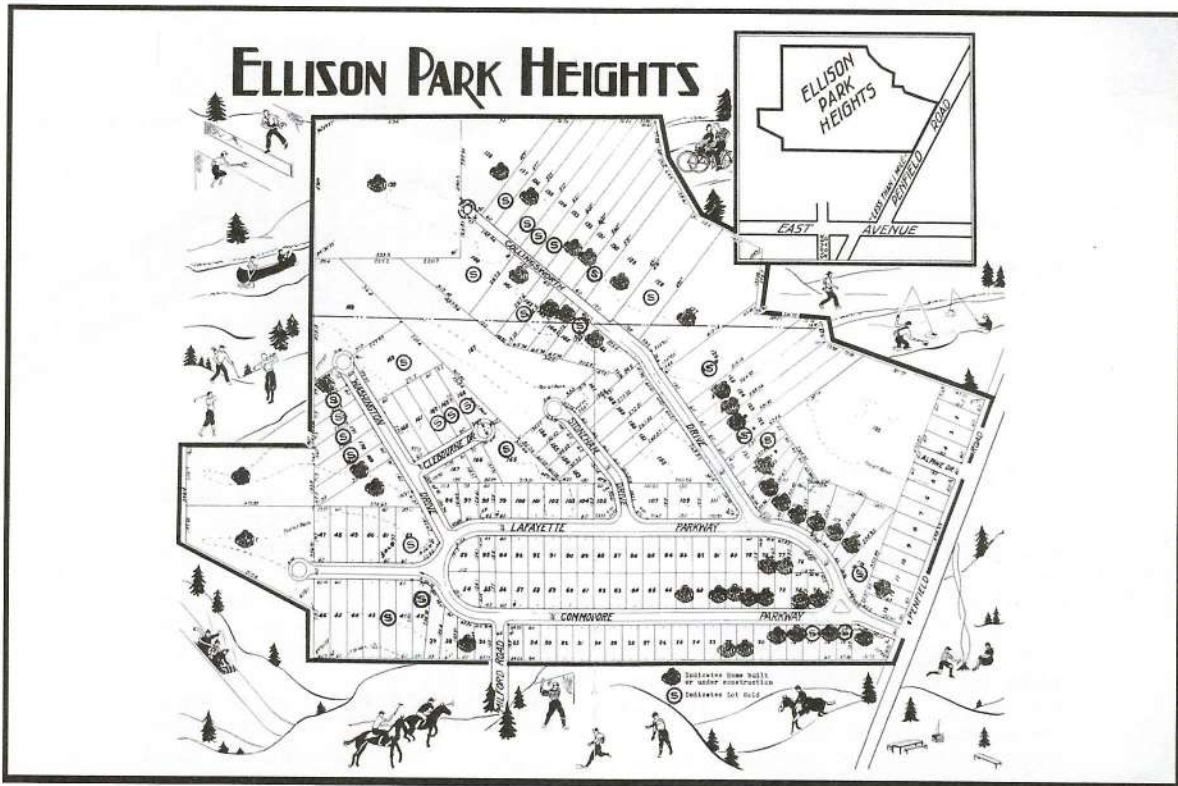
ABCO REALTY CORP.

*Charles H. Ineson*

CHARLES H. INESON, PRES.

43 Franklin Street  
Rochester, New York

ELLISON PARK HEIGHTS, MAYWOOD, MAYWOOD HILLS, MAYWOOD ADDITION, MONROE AVENUE ESTATES, PARKWOOD TRACT



4



*Real Estate Advertising Map and Aerial View  
Circa 1940*

The unusually pastoral nature of the landscape, along with its convenient location, attracted many buyers to this very promising and well-promoted neighborhood development of homes.

Because the development bordered Ellison Park the real estate developers appropriately and successfully emphasized the nearby natural and recreational activities in their advertising. These were mostly accurate – such as tennis courts, canoeing, golf practice, bicycling, fishing, baseball fields, picnicking, horseback riding, sledding, and the infamous toboggan slide – the most dangerous of all of the sporting events in Ellison Park. The top of the toboggan slide was at the end of Washington Drive in Ellison Park Heights. It was eventually closed, and blocked off, by the Monroe County Parks Department because of its extremely perilous nature and the history of injuries there.

Perhaps the only misleading, but amusing, illustration of the real estate developer's brochure was that of people playing polo in the park. (See Illustration)

What began with the first house, built by the Merle and Daniel McRae family at 18 Commodore Parkway in 1936, soon grew close to the current total of homes in the neighborhood – now one-hundred-fifty-one – in very few years. (Fifty years later, in 1986, thirty-one of the original owners still were residing in their original homes, and several were in those homes after that.)

Its geologically formed site, with those natural boundaries on the edge of Ellison Park, led to a rather defined and cohesive neighborhood sensibility, and many community organizations and traditions began.

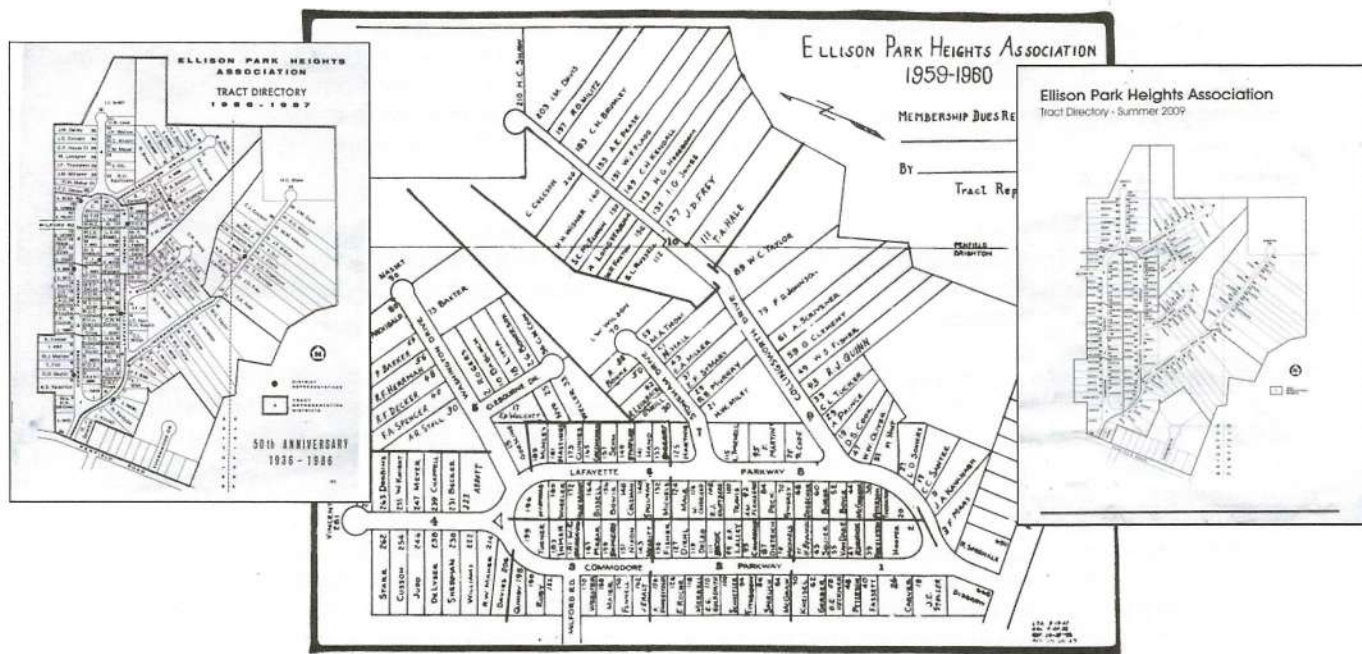
Some are not still active, such as "The Ellison Park Heights Child Study Group," "The Ellison Park Heights Home Bureau Unit," and some of the other formally organized education, garden, and scout organizations.

But many of those early traditions are still much a part of the neighborhood today.

The Ellison Park Heights Association (EPHA), started promptly after the development of the neighborhood, is still a very active part of the community, which next year will celebrate its eightieth anniversary.

The EPHA helps to continue some of those traditions that started as far back as the 1930s.

One of the most important missions of EPHA is to regularly publish a directory of the neighborhood, with a map of the neighborhood showing the location of its current residents, and information about their families, contacts, activities, pets, and sometimes information about their tenure in the home.



The EPHA has also traditionally published a printed newsletter, entitled "The Zephyr," with news of coming neighborhood events, significant updates regarding residents, and information of important to the larger community.

(In the 21st Century, the neighborhood has a community e-mail website to expedite most immediate contact with neighbors and news of significantly timely nature.)

Other long time traditions include a "Newcomers' Reception" in the fall, to welcome new residents, a very old and often visited picturesque tradition at December holiday time of placing luminary candles along the sides of every street in front of every home, an annual Memorial Day parade of children, parents, Brighton Volunteer Fire Fighters and their trucks, and Brighton Police Squad Cars, frequently followed by a neighborhood picnic in the park. Sometimes there are well-attended whole-neighborhood garage sales, occasional home and garden tours, and above average neighborliness.

**Perhaps nothing is more revealing and historically rich on the topic of this little neighborhood than the remarkable and diverse document about Ellison Park Heights prepared sixty-three years ago, in 1952, primarily by residents — Jean Smith and Pearle Dailey — with many expert contributors — their title simply being — "Our Neighborhood."**

Some sections of this include — "Groups in Ellison Park Heights," "Wild Flowers in Ellison Park Heights," "Trees and Shrubs of Ellison Park Heights," a very long list of "Birds of Ellison Park Heights," "Indian Landing School," "Our Nearest town — Penfield," and "Ellison Park: A Valley Within a Valley."

In their introduction they mention some of the following:

6

*"Architecture of our homes leans largely toward Colonial designs, tho' there are some English-type houses and a few ranch-type. Yard frontages run from 60' to over 200' and (lots) from ¼ to about 13 acres. Encouraged by the natural loveliness of our land, residents are avid gardeners and flowers and vegetables of all descriptions flourish."*

They go on...

*"In 1943 a national survey was made of a modern subdivision and our neighborhood was selected. From it, we quote "A subdivision consisting of 150 homes, constructed before the time of Pearl Harbor was selected on the outskirts of a large city in the Middle Atlantic States. The homes are attractive and somewhat above average... among some of the appliances are 46 sewing machines, 21 workshops, 26 movie machines, 32 corn poppers, 81 waffle irons, 27 bottle warmers, 78 mixers... etcetera.*

*And from an article in Times Union Newspaper, (they) quote, "Residents are 'family folk' but find time for ample activities. They belong to golf clubs, university clubs, civic and technical associations and other groups. Children are buoyant, healthy, happy and perhaps — a shade better endowed with this world's goods than the average.*

*The average home is occupied by 4.8 people. The husband more often than not works at Eastman Kodak, drives one car which his wife gets at least twice a week, gets three weeks vacation which is spent on long or short trips, going back home to grandparents, fishing, camping, painting the south-side of the house, and worrying about the moles and elm beetles. They feel lucky they bought their house when they did — are tempted to sell their average 6-room plus home for around \$20,000, which originally cost much less. They feel safe in having no-thru streets and have turned down a petition for street lights. Some say our Neighborhood is like a friendly small-town, with common garden problems and joys, help during illnesses, and 'pool-car' arrangements. Publicity is given as a separate unit through Brighton Post and voting is done at Brighton or Penfield. We are situated about fifteen minutes (by buses) to the main part of Rochester (which) run on schedule from Penfield Road. We are within short distance of many denominational churches."*

THIS IS LIFE HOUSE No. 1

IT IS A NEW, HANDLING HOUSE PLANNED FOR A FAMILY OF FIVE OR SIX. INSIDE ARE SIX ROOMS AND TWO BATHS.

FROM THE ROAD PLANNED STEPS LEAD UP TO A GRACIOUS AND USEFUL HOME DESIGNED AND BUILT FOR THE NEEDS OF THE MODERN LIFE.

# LIFE HOUSES

HERE ARE EIGHT NEW HOMES PLANNED AND BUILT FOR U.S. 1940

Most people want to own the house they live in. For them a home of their own is the most satisfying place to abide, the most satisfying place to grow in. It is a place to delight and comfort a man. There are few things in life more worth fighting for.

But not even half the families in the U. S. live in houses they own. Between the demand for houses and the supply of them there has been for years a great gap, bridged and widened by the cold facts that there were few low-cost houses and that houses were hard to buy. Today there are signs that the gap is narrowing. On these pages LIFE makes an attempt—in words and pictures—to make it even narrower. Here in wood, brick, stone, show us new houses for modern Americans. There are eight different models of varying sizes and costs, designed for LIFE by eight eminent American architectural firms. They are LIFE'S Houses for 1940. There are now 141 of them built or building.

Almost two years ago LIFE took its first dramatic step toward helping Americans fulfill their ever-present dream of owning a home. At that time LIFE (Sept. 16, 1938) published plans for "Eight Houses for Modern Living." They were designed for four specific and representative U. S. families with incomes from \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year. LIFE's purpose then was to demonstrate important advances that have been made in the past decade in the design and technology of housebuilding. The response to the story was quick, the impact solid.

Today LIFE carries on its paper into three-dimensional reality. This time the field and the notes were more limited. The architect's were told to plan houses for people who earned from \$1,800 to \$8,000 a year. In collaboration with LIFE's sister magazine, ARCHITECTURAL FORUM, the plans for the houses (identified by numbers from 1 to 8) were drawn up, criticized, reworked, finally approved. The National Association of Real Estate Boards endorsed LIFE's program, helped in getting the acceptance of builders.

Up to mid-June, 73 builders in 12 States and Canada were building or had built LIFE Houses. Many others are planned. Fifty-one of those completed were furnished for show purposes by 17 department and furniture stores. They represent now an investment of more than \$1,000,000. Already a dozen have been sold. At right is an index of the houses and their designers. On page 56 a geographical directory of such houses will tell the reader where to go to see a LIFE House, who built it and who furnished it.

As LIFE records these houses the housing trendset of the past few years shows signs of becoming a real boom. In 1934 and 1935 only 200,000 single-family houses were built. Last year 500,000 were built. This year construction is about 600,000. As the number of houses built rises there is a highly significant drop in the price of the individual house. The average price per house has fallen from \$3,800 in 1935 to \$1,742 in 1938—in spite of a slight increase in building costs. This means that the American householder is at last entering himself in lower-cost housing. It is on the vast collapsed market that big big building boom must be based. It is the market with which LIFE is largely concerned.

House building costs vary so greatly (as to 20%) in different parts of the U. S. LIFE chooses its houses by buyer's incomes. A man averages 67% of his income for rent. Today the Federal Housing Administration mortgage loans are so liberal and interest rates so low that it is easier to finance a house than it ever has been before. A \$1,000 house can be bought for \$400 down and \$200 a month. Today a good house is a sound hedge against a possibility of wartime inflation.

These LIFE Houses definitely design the paper a lot for his money. To someone who has lived in a house built 15 or 20 years ago, they present some startling changes. They give most of their space to rooms most useful for living. Bedrooms are smaller because they don't have to be big. Dining rooms are being eliminated in favor of alcoves at the end of living rooms, adding space to the much-needed living room. Windows are bigger and kitchens are wonderful.

Hardly but tensibly, American families are beginning to move away from crowded cities. And a few days ago an early census report showed that 70,000 families in the past ten years had picked up to population. The flow into urban centers has been checked. It is moving out again to demonstrate are beginning to satisfy their grand age to live in a space of their own, in a house of their own.

**LIFE House 1** (see p. 78). Architect: Cameron Clark of New York. Two bedrooms, living room with dining alcove, kitchen, bath. For the man making \$1,800 to \$2,500 a year.

**LIFE House 2** (see p. 80). Architect: Gardner A. Dailey of San Francisco. Two bedrooms, living room with dining alcove, kitchen, bath. For the man making \$2,500 to \$3,000 a year.

**LIFE House 3** (see p. 82). Architect: Mulholland & Ryan of Chicago. Three bedrooms, living room, kitchen, utility room, bath. For the man making \$3,500 to \$4,500 a year.

**LIFE House 4** (see p. 83). Architect: George Howe & Robert M. Byrne of Philadelphia. Two bedrooms, living room with dining alcove, kitchen, utility room, bath. For the man making \$3,000 to \$4,000 a year.

**LIFE House 5** (see p. 84). Architect: Perry, Shaw & Hepburn of Boston. Three bedrooms, living-dining room, kitchen, bath. For the man making \$3,500 to \$4,500 a year.

**LIFE House 6** (see p. 86). Architect: Tremor & Fells of New York. Three bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, two baths. For the man making \$4,500 to \$5,500 a year.

**LIFE House 7** (see p. 88). Architect: Shreve, Lamb & Harmon of New York. Three bedrooms, living-dining room, kitchen, bath, terrace. For the man making \$5,000 to \$6,000 a year.

**LIFE House 8** (see p. 89). Architect: Shaw, Noyes & Murphy of Chicago. Three bedrooms, living-dining room, kitchen, utility room, bath, terrace. For the man making \$5,500 to \$6,000 a year.

## Home Design Featured in the July 1, 1940 Issue of LIFE Magazine — as on Washington Drive in Ellison Park Heights — built for the Meriwether Baxter Family

Since the 1930s, Ellison Park Heights has continually attracted many people with various notable skills and occupations... some with more recognizable names than others — all with an affection for the neighborhood.

At some time, families of well-known local people, such as in music, organists David and Marion Craighead and oboist Robert Sprengle, in education Mark Ellingson, in politics State Senator Jack Perry and County Executive Maggie Brooks, in clergy, such as Weldon Crossland, in the arts Bill Mitchell and Jim Christy... and so many others who have been dedicated to teaching, medicine, engineering, social work, law, horticulture, real estate, commerce, and especially caring for children, spouses, parents, and so on.

Typically, as people are moving more often in the past few decades, residents may not stay in their Ellison Park Heights' homes as long as they often did in the past, but there is still a strong sense of neighborhood. Some of the original large shade trees from the 1930s and 1940s are still there, and some have been thoughtfully replaced. Many residents are still avid gardeners, birders, hikers, and involved with larger community affairs including the environment, roads, and education.

In many ways, the Ellison Park Heights neighborhood is not so different than when the first home was built about eighty years ago.

Written, with some editing and illustrations, by Ron Richardson

## The Rochester Park Band Plays at the Opening and Dedication of Ellison Park in 1927



*The Rochester Park Band Plays at the Genesee Valley Park bandstand in 1922. From the Albert E Stone Collection of the Rochester Museum and Science Center*

On October 1, 1927, the Rochester Park Band came to Brighton to play for the Dedication and Opening of Ellison Park; this was a particularly promising day, since Ellison Park was the first of many proposed county parks. Excited visitors arrived from towns throughout the county — people like Mr. and Mrs. O.L. Shult, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ginegawa and their daughter, Freda, all from Webster, who joyfully attended that day.

Picnickers spread their lunches on the tables and cooked their meats on the fireplaces, scattered thoughtfully along the banks of Irondequoit Creek. One can imagine the red-checked tablecloths, the smell of burning charcoal wafting through the air, the shrieks and laughter of children frolicking on this first, wonderful Opening Day of the park we've all come to enjoy.

Though a threat of rain had hovered the previous week, in fact, the day was splendid, with temperatures in the 70s, the rain waiting to fall a couple of days later. At 2:15pm, Hermann Dossenbach, director, picked up his baton, held it in mid air, and in the next moment the Rochester Park Band, in their handsome cream-colored suits, commenced with the magnificent sounds of the brass instruments - the cornets, trumpets, trombones, tubas filling the air.

Though we don't know the actual list of selections for this day's events, the Park Band may have played a piece from Victor Herbert's well-loved operetta, *The Wizard of the Nile*, with its signature phrase, "Am I a wiz?" Or perhaps they played the Overture from Wagner's "Tannhauser" (well-appreciated by these pre-WWII, Rochester-area listeners, many of whom hailed from German-immigrant families). Both of

these pieces were performed by the Rochester Park Band earlier in July at Ontario Beach.

Then again, it's possible that the Ellison Park crowd enjoyed hearing the "Londonderry Air" or Tobani's, "Echoes from the Metropolitan Opera"; both songs were played by the band at the Lilac Festival in May of that year. The Park Band excelled at presenting a mix of classical and popular tunes, and so they may have serenaded the crowd with the Minuet from Mozart's *Don Juan* and then followed by bringing a smile to their audience's faces as they entertained with, "Sam, the Accordion Man" and "After I Say I'm Sorry" — they played all of these tunes the previous August at a street dance on Alexander Street in Rochester, between South and Mount Hope Avenues.

The Rochester Park Band, begun in 1901, was famous throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and not just in Rochester - they played all over the western part of New York State, for example, to crowds of 10,000-20,000 people in Syracuse's Burnet Park, and also in Geneva's Lakeside Park, where the evening event was lit by hundreds of Japanese lanterns. Theodore Dossenbach (this article writer's great-grandfather) was its first director and was loved by all. Handsome and charming, he was often said to be generous with his encores. On many Christmas Eves, Theodore and his Park Band, accompanied by Rochester's Santa Claus (Frank G. Newall) and other dignitaries, drove in trucks (offered for use by the Rochester Stamping Company) throughout the neighborhoods, playing Christmas carols, pausing at Mr. Eastman's and Mayor Edgerton's house and others, visiting the Home for the Friendless and the Rescue Mission and the hospitals, and delivering presents to the special children at St. Mary's Orphan Asylum.

Theodore continued as Director of the Park Band until his death, too soon at age 53, in 1924, at which point his brother, Hermann, took over. Hermann was quite famous in his own right, having founded and conducted the Rochester Orchestra, which eventually became the Rochester Philharmonic; he also co-founded a little school called the DKG Institute of Musical Art, which George Eastman eventually purchased and made into the Eastman School of Music. Both Hermann and Theodore Dossenbach, children of poor German immigrants, were members of the Dossenbach Quartet/Quintet which played at Mr. Eastman's East Avenue home for the Thursday and Sunday Musicales from 1905-1919.

The crowd at Ellison Park, on this magical Opening Day, would have been thrilled to hear the Rochester Park Band! The concert concluded with a rousing rendition of The National Air — the Star Spangled Banner, during which everyone proudly stood together. Now buoyed up by the music, they listened to remarks by Frank T. Ellison, donor of the Park Lands - can you imagine the applause given him for his generosity? Also, Dr. Arthur T. Parker, former state archaeologist and director of the Rochester Municipal Museum (eventually to become the Rochester Museum and Science Center) gave an address entitled, "The Red Man's Gateway to the Genesee Country."

Historical pageants then dominated the day. The Boy Scouts presented a picture of LaSalle's first visit to Indian Landing in 1669 — and they were able to do this on the exact spot where it occurred all those years ago. Also near the historic Indian Landing, the Girl Scouts demonstrated pioneering skills in three stone fireplaces. The Seneca Indians, members of the Tonawanda Reservation, and descendants of the Seneca Iroquois, who once owned all of the Genesee country, proudly took part in the dedication ceremonies. Chief Freeman Johnson was there, as well as his great-aunt Go-wat-ha (Nancy Black Squirrel), who was 110 years old.

It was a great day, to be sure. It had been well-advertised in all the surrounding papers, such as Fairport's *Herald-Mail*, the *Medina Daily Journal*, Rochester's *The Daily Record* (covering "Law, Real Estate, Finance and General Intelligence") and *The Democrat and Chronicle*, *The Troy Times*, the *Niagara Falls Gazette*, and also in the Long Island *Nassau Daily Review* (even though it was printed a week after the event).

Next time you visit Ellison Park, think back to this event of the past. As you walk the nature trails, remember Frank Ellison, whose generosity we benefit from to this very day. And, in your imagination, hear the magnificent music of the Rochester Park Band and let their proud strains lift you higher, and then step taller and appreciate all that we have had and still have.

*Written by Lisa Kleman, who is currently researching and writing a book about her Dossenbach relatives.*

*Lisa gave a Focus 45 talk on March 21, 2015 at the George Eastman House entitled "George Eastman and the Dossenbach Quartet"*

# ELLISON PARK



By Mary Jo Lanphear

10

The area now known as Ellison Park figured in the history of the Native American fur trade, French exploration, and Yankee settlement long before its winding creek and rolling hills became Monroe County's first public park.

The Irondequoit Landing was one of the most strategic places in Northeast America until the end of the French & Indian War in 1764 because it allowed traders and travelers to by-pass the falls on the Genesee and Niagara Rivers and reach the fur trade that flowed along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Rene-Robert Sieur de la Salle landed in 1669, seeking the route to the Ohio trail but the Senecas in Totiakton (near what is now Victor), though hospitable, offered little information on how to reach it. Eighteen years later, Marquis de Denonville lead a punitive raid on Ganondagon and Totiakton to free up the western fur trade. He, too, debarked at the Landing on his way south. North American fur was still in demand in the fashionable parts of England and France in the early eighteenth century, causing both nations to establish trading posts along Irondequoit Bay to deal with the Senecas, their link

to the Mid-western furriers. The French traded out of Fort des Sables (near present-day Sea Breeze) beginning around 1717. Shortly after that, the English governor of New York sent annual trading parties to the Irondequoit Landing, the most notable one that of Captain Peter Schuyler. It is Schuyler's 1721-1722 sojourn that is exemplified by the 1938 replica "fort" in Ellison Park. The fortified blockhouse design chosen by the replicators in 1938 does not depict the true tenor of the times. In reality, the Senecas wanted to adopt the tools and weapons of the modern age as soon as possible and to that end came their perennial request for blacksmiths to live near their villages to repair their pots and hatchets. The peaceful tribes would have been offended by a blockhouse.

Years later, during the Revolutionary War, Captain John Sullivan's punitive march on Seneca villages in 1779 severed the good will established by the early traders, scattering the Senecas and effectively removing their presence from the Landing. When John Tryon arrived in 1797, he found the remnants of the 1721 trading house on the bluff overlooking the Landing.



*Ellison Park Bridge*

Originally purchased by his brother, Salmon Tryon, of Saratoga County, the development of the commercial village fell to John Tryon when Salmon needed cash and sold the 315-acre tract to his brother for \$3500 in August of 1797. John Tryon's plan included a warehouse, store, distillery, ashery, and shipping dock on Irondequoit Creek and forty residential lots on the hill west of the Landing. The top floor of the 40' x 90,' five-story warehouse opened onto the hilltop above the road to the Landing; its bottom floor was accessible from the Landing itself. By autumn of 1798 it was ready to receive goods from the east but not until winter when the muddy roads froze to a solid, more passable condition.

John took on a partner, Augustus Griswold, who built a frame house on the bluff overlooking the Landing and across the road from the "never failing spring," where cattails still grow. Still standing on Landing Road North, this small frame house is the "Old Tryon House."

For a time the small community thrived, buoyed by boatbuilding and trade but John Tryon's death in 1807 signaled the decline of Tryon. The War of 1812, with British ships on Lake Ontario, contributed to the ship building enterprise at the Landing but it discouraged civilian commerce on the Lake and put off prospective settlers. Perhaps the greatest reason for the end of Tryon was the knowledge that the long-planned Erie Canal would use a route well south of Tryon, effectively eliminating commercial trade at the Landing.

The inhabitants moved on to other communities. The Tryon heirs mortgaged and sold their property in the village to each other, blurring the original lot

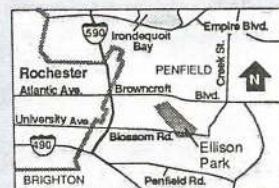
## A PARKS CENTENNIAL SCRAPBOOK



### TOBOGGAN SLIDE

Ellison Park continues to attract people for winter activities as this toboggan slide did in 1951. The toboggan slide is no longer there, but the park offers ice skating, bridle and cross-country ski trails, hiking, softball fields, tennis courts and a playground.

This 447-acre county park also preserves the site of Peter Schuyler's Trading Post built near Indian Landing on Irondequoit Bay around 1721 as a fur trading post and recreated in 1938 as Fort Schuyler. Just west of the trading post, John Tryon founded Tryontown in 1797. This photograph is from the collection at the Rochester Public Library, Local History Division.



The Parks Centennial Scrapbook will appear the second and fourth Tuesday of each month in 1988 to commemorate the start of the local parks system.

*Toboggan slide in 1988 newspaper*

lines, and eventually selling it out of the family. Farms replaced the houses, the ashery, and the distillery. At some point, Mortimer Reynolds, founder of the Reynolds Library and son of Rochester pioneer settler, Abelard Reynolds, acquired the land. After Reynolds' death in 1892, Frank T. Ellison purchased the two hundred ten-acre tract.

In mid-December, 1926, the Monroe County Park Commission announced the gift of the \$100,000 farm in honor of Mr. Ellison's father, pioneer



*Irondequoit Creek*

Nathaniel B. Ellison. It was to be the first of Monroe County's "wild parks." Herbert M. Blanche, a Cornell University forestry professor, cited several reasons why the site was ideal for a public park:

- "1. It is easily reached from Rochester by main highways.*
- 2. Park roadways could be readily constructed to make the lower area accessible.*
- 3. Sufficiently large level areas exist to provide for parking, sweeps of meadow for recreation, tennis courts, and other uses found desirable.*
- 4. The winding creeks add interest, and could be used for canoeing and boating, connecting with Irondequoit Bay about one and a half miles north.*
- 5. The irregular wooded slopes surrounding the flat should be included in the development, serving to make possible complete seclusion to those within the park. Trails and picnic sites could be developed in this surrounding, irregular topography.*
- 6. Historically, the "Indian Landing," as the beginning of the Ohio Trail, adds materially to the interest of the tract."*

Beginning in March of 1927, workers removed old fences, fallen timber, and overgrowth. They drained marshes, cleared the creek of sunken logs, and planted grass in the meadow areas. Although not officially open to the public until October 1, Ellison Park was visited almost daily throughout that year by Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, other organizations, and family groups. In April of 1927, the Park Commission publicized its intent to purchase the nine-acre Chambery farm in order to add the Irondequoit Landing to the park property. A month later the Park Commission added land along Landing Road to create a park entrance off that street. Until that time, the only way to enter Ellison Park was by way of Rich's Dugway. Blossom Road ended at Landing Road.

In anticipation of the crowd expected to attend the October 1 dedication ceremony, newspapers published directions to the three entrances to the park. Coming from the trolley stop on Blossom Road near the old gas tank, one could walk down Blossom Road and take a left onto Landing Road, then walk down that road to the new entrance near the Landing. One could also take a right onto Landing Road then proceed to Rich's Dugway and take that road to the park entrance. From Penfield, visitors were advised to take Bidwell Road that led from Creek Street to Sperry's Mills (now the Daisy Flour Mill). A few years later, Blossom Road was extended from Landing Road to Sperry's Mills, connecting with Bidwell Road, at which time the entire road became Blossom Road.

The dedication ceremony began at 2:15 p.m. with a concert by the Park Band of Rochester led by Hermann Dossenbach followed by speeches and blessings. Boy Scouts presented a pageant depicting LaSalle's visit to the Landing in 1669. Senecas from the Tonawanda reservation were on hand including Nancy Black Squirrel, the 110-year-old great aunt of Chief Freeman Johnson who was in charge of the group of Senecas.

In the years after the dedication, Ellison Park acquired several popular amenities. The first, in conjunction with Troop F at the Culver Road Armory, was the addition of bridle trails to the park. The Country Lane and Bridle Trail Association of Mon-

roe County laid out nearly six miles of trails delineated with orange metal discs with white arrows bearing the legend "Country Trails." The formal opening of the trail from the Armory to Ellison Park was on July 2, 1927. The opening of the trail from Genesee Valley Park to Ellison Park took place in May of 1928. Horseback riding in Ellison continues to this day.

In variance with its connotation as a "wild park," in 1937 Ellison Park workmen transformed a dumping area into a magnificent three-acre, three-tiered rose garden with terraced stone retaining walls in a semicircle overlooking Irondequoit Creek. One can still see the rock walls at the base of the sledding hill.

Perhaps the most famous of Ellison Park's attractions was the 800-foot toboggan slide that operated on a hillside on the Park's south side. Park Superintendent Robert Cochrane estimated that the top speed on November 24, 1938, was 80 miles per hour, a rate achieved by packing four inches of snow onto the wooden chute then dowsing it with water to create a glazed surface. All participants had to sign waivers before climbing on their toboggans. Those between eight and ten years old had to be accompanied by adults. A successful run would send the toboggan down the chute and along the snow-covered ground almost to Blossom Road. WPA workers constructed a warming shelter with fireplace in 1937, allowing tobogganers to rest a bit before the long climb up the hill for another run. Long-time residents say that the slide closed in the early 1960s due to maintenance issues. It never reopened.

Ellison Park today contains 447 acres in the towns of Brighton and Penfield. Its tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and trails would be familiar to the visitors of 1927, but disc golf, geo caches, and the dog park might cause a raised eyebrow or two. Nonetheless, Ellison Park continues to be one of Monroe County's most accessible and most visited parks.

*Mary Jo Lanphear is Town of Brighton Historian*

## TWO BRIGHTON WINTERS



14



*Top: Collingsworth Drive in Ellison Park Heights during the recent bitter winter of 2014-2015  
But this was not the only fierce snowy winter in Brighton's history. The March 1960 photo of Cromwell Drive  
shows another record snowfall. Venturing out to have fun in it are Sarah and David Brayer.*

## COLLINGSWORTH DRIVE IN ELLISON PARK HEIGHTS IN WINTER



15

### HISTORIC BRIGHTON

FOUNDED 1999

#### *Officers*

David Whitaker, President  
Janet Hopkin, Vice-President  
Sally McGucken, Secretary  
Joan Martin, Treasurer

Gary Lehmann  
Phillip Lederer  
Marjorie Perlman  
Ron Richardson  
Marjorie Searl  
Jeff Vincent

#### *Board of Directors*

Ellen Adams  
Christopher Brandt  
Peggy Weston Byrd  
Leo Dodd  
Monica Gilligan  
Beth Keigher

Arlene Vanderlinde, founder  
and immediate past-president

Elizabeth Brayer, editor HBN&J  
Mary Jo Lanphear ex-officio,  
Town of Brighton historian



