



HISTORIC BRIGHTON

Newsletter and Journal

Celebrating our Town's history and educating our community about Brighton's past.

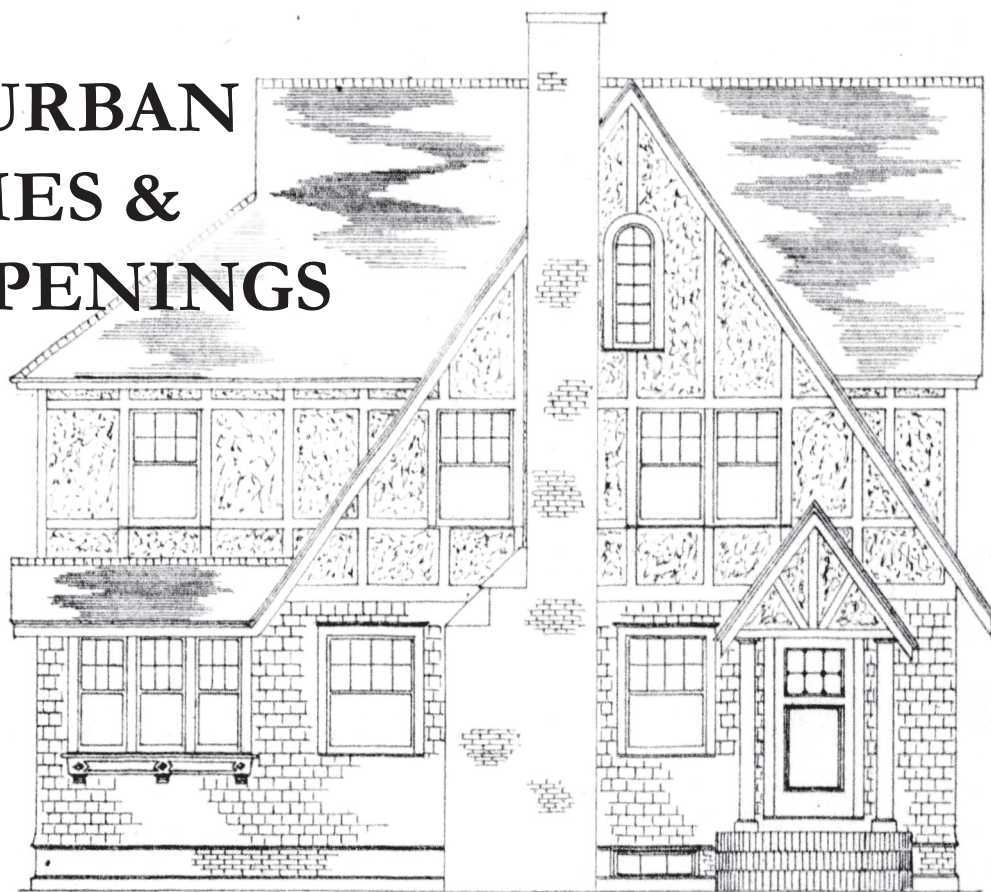
Volume 20, No. 1

www.historicbrighton.org

Winter 2019

DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE MODEL HOME NO. 2

SUBURBAN HOMES & HAPPENINGS



An exterior elevation of a Fred P. Tosch model home, one of many designed to fill the growing suburbs of Rochester, NY (Brighton and Irondequoit), and other neighboring cities to follow

Call for submissions:

Historic Brighton is dedicated to bringing stories and images about the history of our town to you! If you have an image you would like to share or a story you would like us to help you tell, please email info@historicbrighton.org for more information.

HISTORIC BRIGHTON ANNUAL MEETING & WINTER PROGRAM: MICHAEL LASSER — “HALFWAY TO HEAVEN: SONGS ABOUT THE SUBURBS”

Sunday, January 20, 2019 | 2:00 pm

Brighton Town Hall Auditorium
2300 Elmwood Avenue, Rochester, NY 14618

*All Historic Brighton quarterly meetings are
free and open to the community.*

MARJORIE K. RAWLINGS: "SONGS OF A HOUSEWIFE"

By Matthew Bashore

In the mid 1920's Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings moved with her husband Charles to Rochester, NY, the home of Charles' parents. Marjorie, then a 30-year-old newspaper writer, settled down in a new Tudor Revival house at 125 Monteroy Road in suburban Brighton. In 1926, she sold the editor of the Rochester Times-Union on the idea of publishing a poem a day, for five days a week, that would celebrate the joys of domestic life under the title "Songs of a Housewife."

These poems grew so popular with the public that they were eventually syndicated nationwide in 43 other cities. After writing over 500 poems, Rawlings ceased publication in February 1928, and as many of us have often thought in the depth of a frigid Rochester winter, moved to a citrus fruit farm in central Florida.

She divorced Charles, continued writing, and eventually earned the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1939 for *The Yearling*, her coming of age novel set in rural Florida.

Historic Brighton's annual meeting on January 20th will feature a program by Michael Lasser entitled "Halfway to Heaven: Songs about the Suburbs". Though never set to music, Rawlings short lyrical celebrations of suburban life seemed a fitting prelude to this event. Below is one of her "Songs of a Housewife" published on July 14th of 1927. If you want more of these clever snippets of early 20th century domesticity, 250 of them have been reprinted as *Poems by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings: Songs of a Housewife* (1997 Univ. Press of Florida), and available at your local library

HB



Marjorie K. Rawlings at her typewriter

Sounds on our Street:

*If you should happen down our street
These Summer evenings, you would hear
Neighbor-sounds from far and near,
And busy neighbor-feet.*

*You'd hear dishwashing, finished quick
You'd hear the playing children shout,
With ice cream being ladled out,
And late lawn mowers' click.*

*You'd hear the Jenkins' Ford drive in.
And Jones' old Airedale trotting home,
You'd hear boys whistling on a comb,
And radios begin.*

*You'd hear folks chatting at their doors,
And Sal, the gossip, make her rounds.
These are the street's same evening sounds
You hear, I think, on yours!*



*Rawlings Brighton residence at 125
Monteroy Road*

“BIRDS AND BEES ALL AROUND”: SONGS FOR THE SUBURBS

By Michael Lasser

*“I’m longing to settle down
In a little suburban town.
Who wouldn’t like trees,
Birds and Bees,
All around?”*

—James Monaco, Edgar Leslie
“My Troubles are Over” (1928)

Many people believe that the suburbs exploded in size right after World War II because they provided inexpensive houses for veterans and their families. Those people are both right—and wrong.

Levittown looked innovative when it began in 1947, but suburbs actually began in the United States in the 1920s, mainly around Boston, and especially around New York. Wealthy Manhattanites built summer “cottages” on Long Island before World War I, on what came to be called the “Gold Coast.” Because these people were rich and powerful, governments soon built roads for them to use.

When the middle class began to buy suburban houses a decade later, it imitated on a smaller scale what the wealthy had already built—block after block of houses set back

from the road and surrounded by a garden and lawn to suggest the feel and the value of country living. Like many of the mansions, the houses had a vaguely Georgian or Tudor look (take a slow drive down Bonnie Brae Avenue, for example). They stretched along gently curving streets; the only straight lines were the highway and the railroad track that took commuters to the city for work. The return home at night was to someplace idyllic. As one song put it, the suburb was located “halfway to heaven” (J. Russell Robinson, Al Dubin, “Halfway to Heaven,” 1928).

Where roads went, real estate developers followed. And where the middle class went, the songwriters followed. When you were single, you rented an apartment (thanks to the Otis elevator) and you courted; when you married, you bought a car and a cottage, and you moved to the suburbs. As Sammy Fain, Irving Kahal, and William Raskin wrote about the friends who gathered nightly on a neighborhood street corner, “Those wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine.”

The suburbs also led to songs about married lovers, still passionate about one another, but even a Flapper and a Sheik, once they married, found

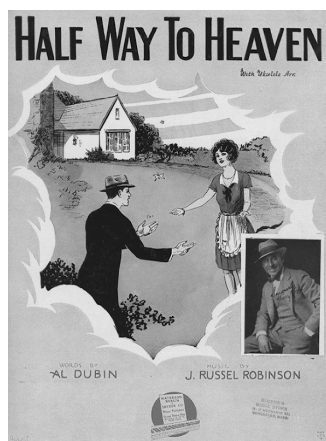
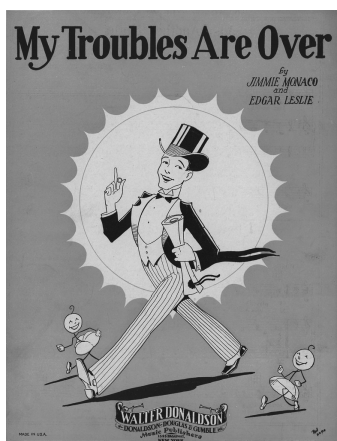
satisfaction in the domestic virtues: “Just Molly and me / And baby makes three, / We’re happy in my blue heaven.” (Walter Donaldson, George Whiting, “My Blue Heaven,” 1927).

In other words, these songs from the 1920s, amidst dozens of jazzy tunes about uninhibited Flappers, affirmed the traditional values of American life. Songs about married lovers resulted in some of the most romantic ballads of the decade, but they also never gave up on a sexy, happy-go-lucky approach to life. You didn’t leave the youthful pleasures of being single at the altar; you took them with you to the suburbs:

*“There’s nothing surer
The rich get richer and the poor
get children.
In the meantime, in between
time,
Ain’t we got fun?”*

—Richard A. Whiting, Gus Kahn,
Raymond B. Egan
“Ain’t We Got Fun” (1920)

—————HB—————



From left to right: “My Troubles Are Over” (1928), “Ain’t We Got Fun” (1920), and “Half Way to Heaven” (1928).

Michael Lasser will present on music in suburban American life in more detail at the Historic Brighton annual meeting on Sunday, January 20th, 2018 at 2:00 PM at the Brighton Town Hall.

FRED P. TOSCH AND THE MASTER MODEL HOME

By Christopher Brandt



Home ownership has often been seen as a key step to achieving the “American Dream.” However, until the widespread use of residential building codes in the mid-twentieth century, the standard of construction quality for the many homes built for the middle and working classes often varied.

Beginning in 1922, spurred by a housing shortage following World War 1, the Better Homes Movement was begun by Marie Maloney, editor of *The Delineator*, and a cohort of national women’s and construction industry publications. The movement promoted homeownership, the increasing independence of the housewife to manage the maintenance, improvement, and decoration of the home, and emphasized the importance of quality design and standardized construction for new homes. The movement quickly gained support at the federal level with then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover serving as chairman on the newly formed National Better Homes Advisory Council. In an effort to develop increased awareness of their goals, the council built a National Model Home on the national mall in Washington D.C. in 1923. The model home was modeled on the personal home of

John Howard Payne, composer of the song *Home Sweet Home*. Although it appeared traditional in design from the exterior, it was a fully modern home which emphasized efficiency of space and incorporated cutting edge construction techniques and appliances. The national model home proved to be a huge success, with thousands of visitors touring its interior and several national publications describing its design in detail.

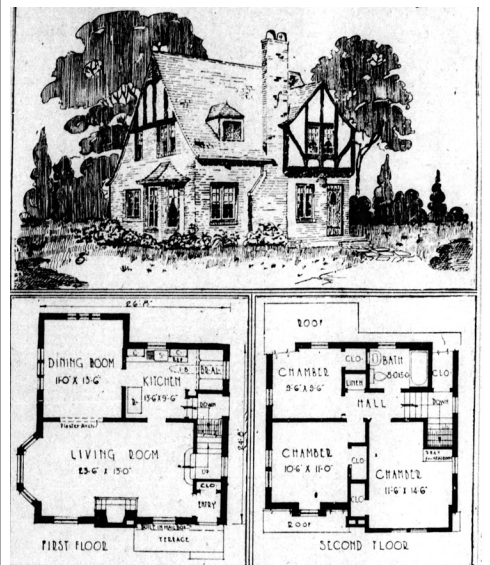
The Homeowners Service Institute, founded in New York City in c.1920, was a proponent of the Better Homes Movement. Following their own demonstration model home built with the sponsorship of the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1922, and after observing the success of the National Model Home in 1923, the Homeowners Service Institute vastly expanded their scope to include developing standards of residential design and construction, and publishing a nationally syndicated weekly newspaper column, the “Small House Page.”

The publication featured a selected home design which met the institute’s standards, publishing the fourteen volume “Own Your Home” Service Library which provided guidance on

Above: Fred Tosch (at center in suit) pictured with his crew of workers in 1929 in front of a nearly completed house at 61 Netherton Road. Photo from the November 3, 1929 issue of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

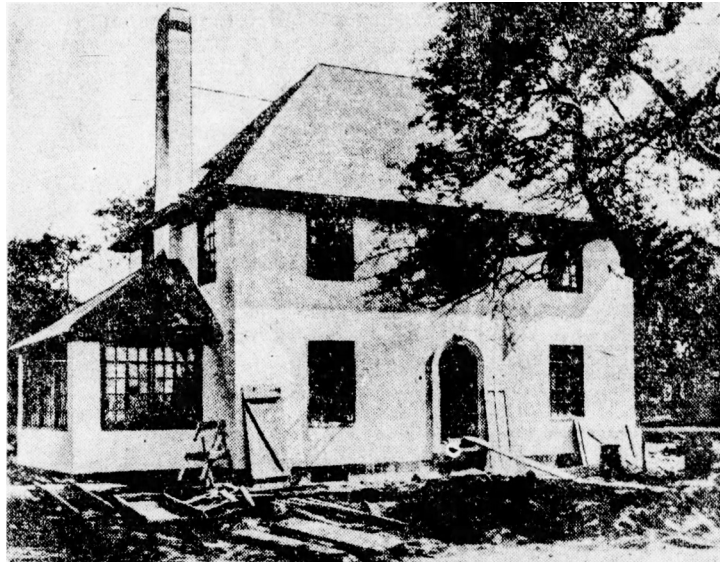
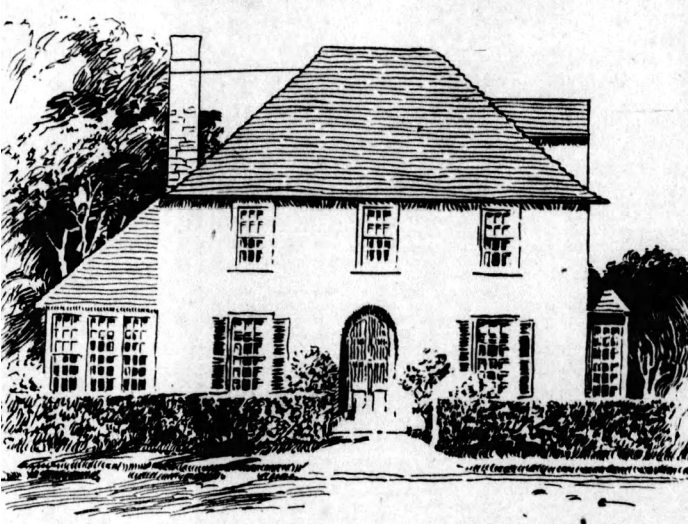


The National Model home, designed by architect Donn Barber FALA, just after its completion and before the final planting of ivy before its public exhibition on the National Mall in 1923. Photo from the Harris and Ewing Collection of the Library of Congress.

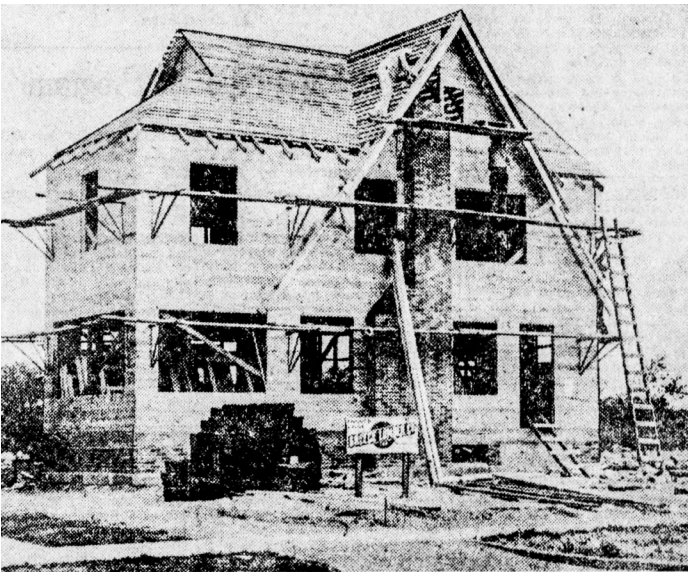


*Plans from Home Owners' Institute Inc. © 1927
An typical example of the Small House Page column. Photo from May 1, 1927 issue of D&C*

DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE MODEL HOME NO. 1



Master Model Home No. 01 at 314 Oakdale Drive in Brighton, exterior elevation (left) and under construction (right) from May 1/June 6, 1927 Rochester Democrat and Chronicle



Master Model Home No. 02 at 230 Wimbledon Road in Irondequoit, under construction (left), and completed (right) from June 5/June 26, 1927 Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

a myriad of issues pertaining to home construction and ownership, and compiling one thousand small house plans into “The Books of a Thousand Homes,” which were certified by and the working drawings sold through the institute.

In 1926, the Homeowners Service Institute then launched their most ambitious effort “to create the desire for and to educate the prospective home owner to build better homes”^[1], the National Demonstration Model Homes Campaign, also known as the Master Model Home program.

The Homeowners Service Institute partnered with local newspapers in several large metropolitan areas across the United States to sponsor one or a small handful of “Master Model Homes” in their respective cities. The Institute would review and certify the drawings and specifications for the master model home to be built, and would help identify and select a local builder who met the Institute’s standards. The local newspaper was to provide focused coverage and documentation of the house(s) as they were being constructed, with

members of the public encouraged to visit the construction site, observe the progress, and meet with an onsite representative who would explain the current construction activity. The Master Model Home program continued with increased success each year until the advent of the Great Depression. It was during the program’s second year, 1927, that the first Master Model Homes in Rochester were built and sponsored by the Democrat and Chronicle.

The inaugural year for the program in Rochester saw two model homes

built, one on Oakdale Drive in Brighton, and the other on Wimbledon Road in Irondequoit. The Brighton model home was an adaptation of a design published in the Institute's "Books of a Thousand Homes" and was built by contractor James L. Garrett, whose descendants continue to build homes in our region.

The Irondequoit model home was not only built by a local contractor, but was also designed by his company; that person was Fred P. Tosch (pictured at right).

Frederick Tosch, born in 1890, was the youngest son of Herman Tosch and Diane Weis. Herman was a journeyman carpenter who helped build several homes and school houses in Rochester, and fostered a lifelong career in the trade for both of his sons, Paul and Frederick. Fred did not complete high school, and began working with his father and older brother in his teens. The enterprising young Tosch followed his brother Paul out to South Dakota in 1912, and quickly established his own electrical equipment supply business.

After returning to Rochester in 1923 with his wife Beulah and young son Willis, he soon returned to his carpentry roots, founding the Fred P. Tosch Company and building a handful of modest homes on Bradburn Street in the 19th Ward Neighborhood in 1924. Mr. Tosch recognized the population boom that Rochester was undergoing and the resultant demand for housing. He leveraged his carpentry skills and experience in sales to quickly establish himself by 1926 as a well-known builder of quality homes for middle and working class families. By the tail end of that year he began to

envision a grander plan for marketing his homes to these families, and started to buy up dozens of lots in the Rogers Estates subdivision in Irondequoit.

Although he began building homes on the lots that were available on streets throughout the Rogers Estates subdivision, by the spring of 1927 his vision, which was to be constructed on Wimbledon Road, began to be advertised in the local newspapers:

"He will be the builder of every house to appear on the street. Already, Mr. Tosch has planned the type of house to be put on each lot. Some will be Colonial, some Dutch, and some English - all interspersed for best effect. He knows the color of the roof of each house; the color of the brick and the kind of trim to be used. If you buy a home on Wimbledon Road, you need never worry about an ugly house springing up beside you."^[2]

Tosch not only exerted control over all of the homes built on the street, but also moved his family into one of the earliest houses he built in 1927. This choice allowed him to have more direct supervision over the construction of the 30+ homes on the street, but also, and more importantly, engendered a sense of trust and approachability to his prospective clients. He used his house as an informal model home and field office to help clients envision the design of their prospective homes. It was likely that his quickly rising reputation for building high-quality affordable homes and the compelling prospect of his new development on Wimbledon Road that led the Democrat and Chronicle to independently sponsor him to build a second model home during their inaugural year in 1927 despite his relative lack of experience when compared to James L. Garrett.

The house made use of standardized materials from national companies

Builder of Home



FRED P. TOSCH

Builder of Democrat and Chronicle
Model Home No. 2.

Photo of Fred P. Tosch at age 37. Photo from the September 11, 1927 issue of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

similar to the other Master Model Homes, but also sourced many components from local Rochester manufacturers including the framing lumber and windows. The design was an iteration on Tosch's ingenious method of modular customization, which he employed to efficiently repeat but distinguish all of the houses on Wimbledon Road. Each home he built had the same general plan but a series of set modifications including exterior cladding style, roof shape, entry vestibule location, and fireplace location, teamed with limited fully custom touches (often the design of the fireplace surround, simplified stained glass pattern in french doors and built-ins, and the front

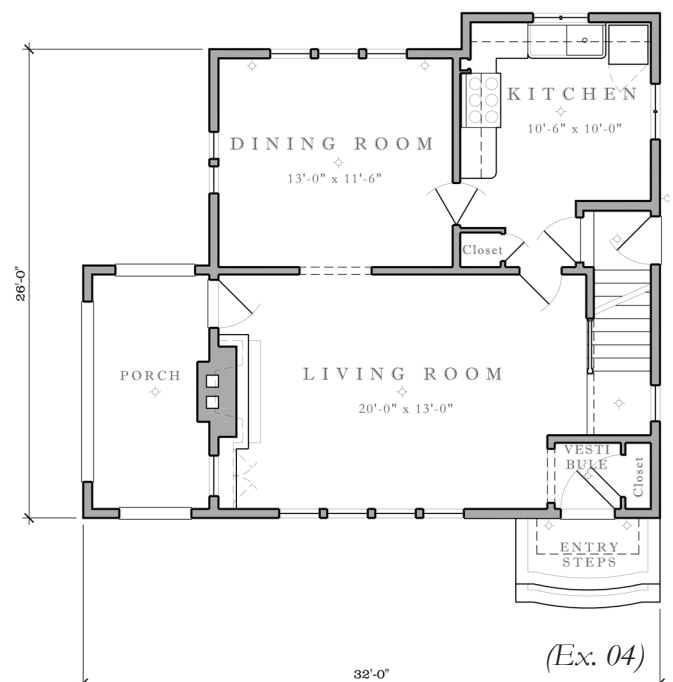
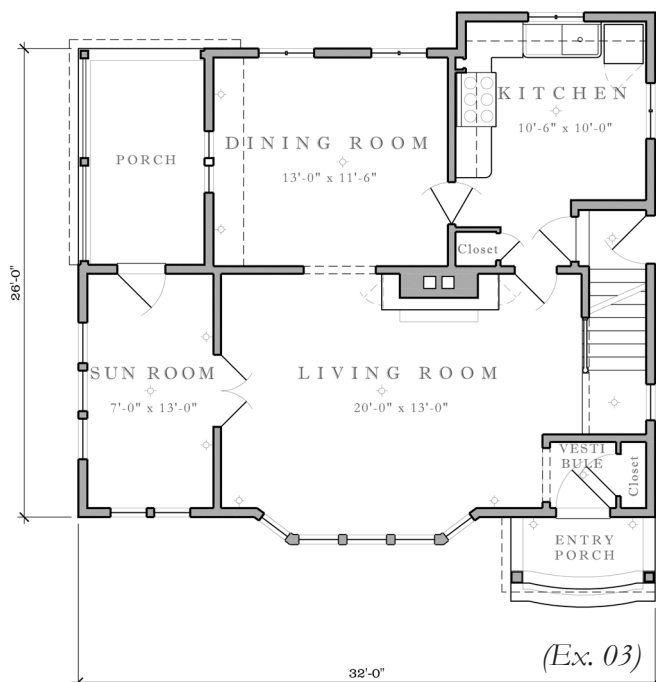
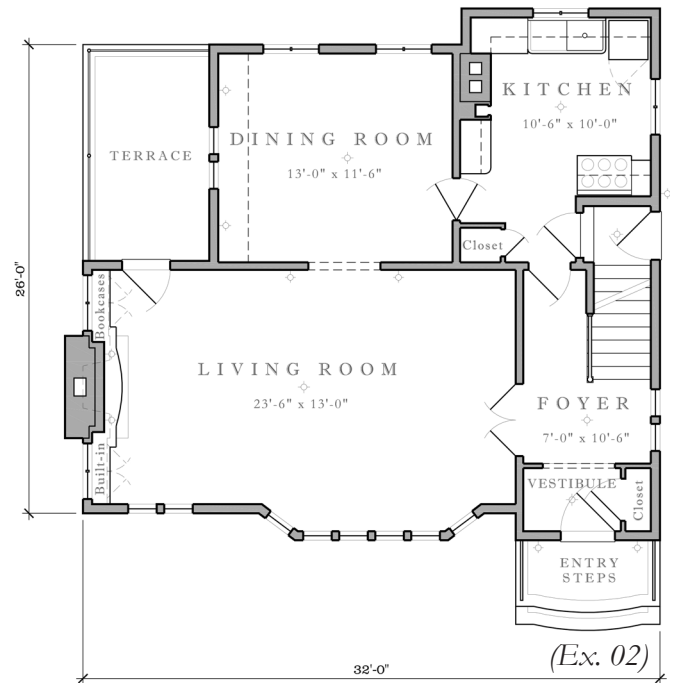
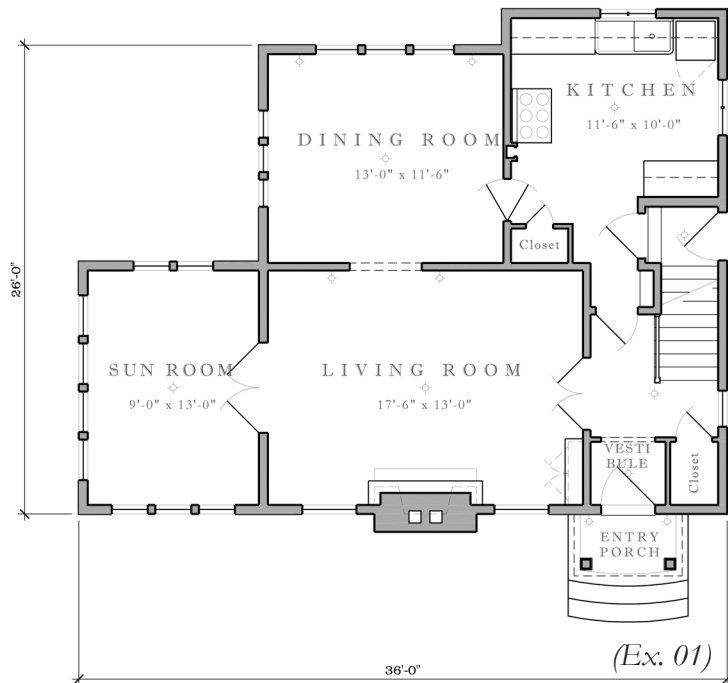
door), created the enticing product of a “custom” affordable home.

The progress of building each of the Master Model Homes was reported on weekly, often with photographs, in the Sunday issue of the Democrat and Chronicle. Mr. Tosch took full advantage of this exposure, often

having an advertisement for his other Wimbledon Road houses in close proximity to the weekly master model home report.

Following on the success of the first year, the Homeowner’s Service Institute and the Democrat and Chronicle selected Fred Tosch to build

the 1928 Master Model Home. The 1928 home was built just half a block down from the 1927 home, and was to be accompanied by the simultaneous construction of nine other additional homes on Wimbledon Road. This spectacle of home building activity from the breaking ground of the Master Model Home on June 7, 1928



Example plans of several Tosch designed homes showcasing his modular customization methods. Example 1 is the plan of the 1927 Master Model Home. Example 2 is the plan of the 1928 Master Model Home. Example 3 is the plan of another home on Wimbledon Road. Example 4 is the plan of the home next-door to the 1927 Master Model home. Photo montage of houses on Wimbledon Road shows the various different stylistic treatments employed by Tosch.

reportedly drew over 20,000 visitors.^[3]

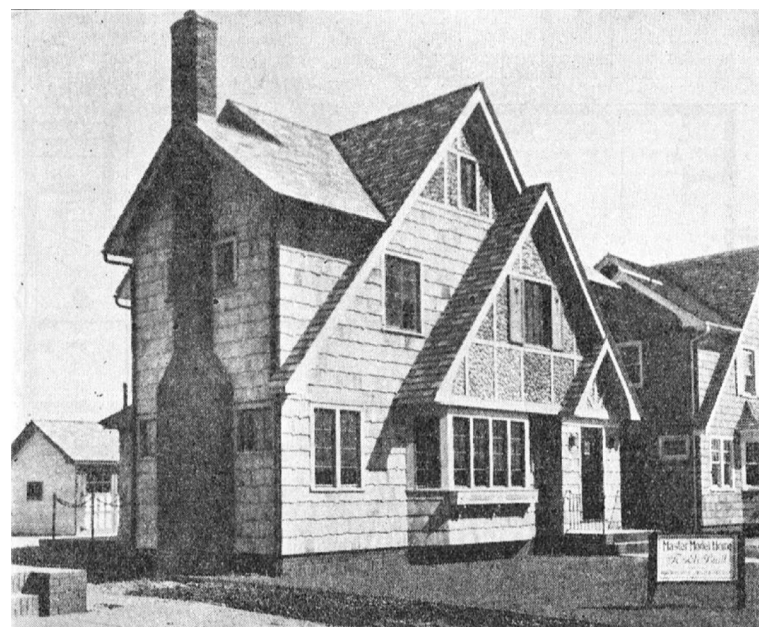
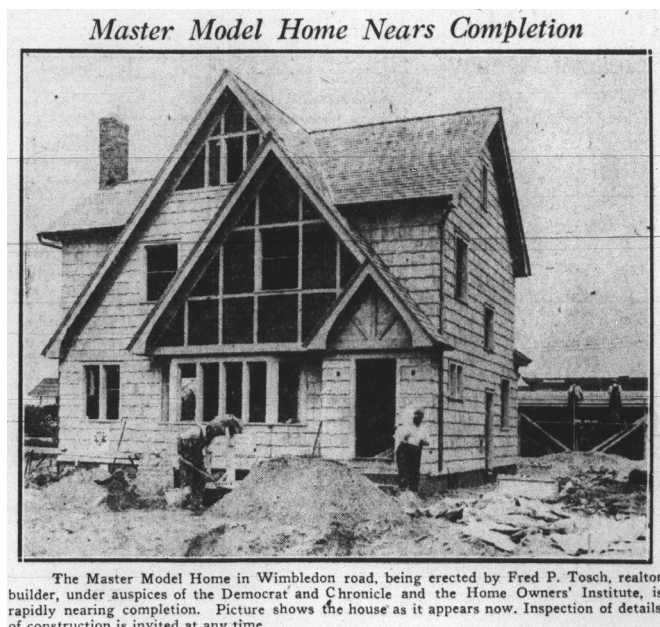
In similar fashion to the year before, the Democrat and Chronicle reported on the construction progress every Sunday with plentiful photographs. The design of the house was another iteration of Tosch's modular customization, but featured more standardized national materials and appliances including Truscon steel casement windows, a GE monitor top refrigerator, and Johns Mansville asbestos tile shingles. To further enhance the visitor's experience to the Master Model Home, Tosch incorporated a recreation room into the basement and commissioned Alfred Church from Sibley's photographic department to produce a film on the home's construction, which was shown to visitors in the rec room during the four-week exhibition. The film notably made use of Eastman Kodak's early experimental color motion picture film, Kodacolor, which had just been debuted by Mr. Eastman that summer. The increased success of the 1928 Master Model Home and

Mr. Tosch's skill at promoting it reached beyond Rochester with the Homeowners Service Institute writing a feature article on the house and Mr. Tosch in the New York Herald Tribune in November of 1928, with a more in-depth article appearing the December 1928 issue of the New York Central Railways Magazine.

By 1929, Fred Tosch had successfully completed his development of Wimbledon Road, improving on his capabilities and expanding his growing business. He was again selected by the Homeowners Service Institute and the Democrat and Chronicle to build what would become the final Master Model Home. The 1929 model home was built on Westbourne Road, less than a mile from the previous two model homes. Westbourne Road was one of three simultaneous streets that Mr. Tosch was building in similar fashion to his wildly successful venture on Wimbledon Road (the other two streets were Netherton Road and Cathaway Park in Rochester). It was a Colonial Revival style iteration of Tosch's modular customization plan,

whereas the previous two had been executed in the Tudor Revival style, and used similar standardized materials and appliances, but without the added enhancement of documentary film used previously.

The Master Model Home program nationally drew to a close around 1930, with many newspapers, including the Democrat and Chronicle, focusing on the practicality and affordability of renovating older homes instead of building new. Despite the national economic downturn, Fred Tosch continued building homes throughout the Rochester region having wisely specialized in providing affordable well-built housing almost exclusively. He continued to partner with Democrat and Chronicle, H. B. Graves furniture company, the FHA and others to drum up interest and press coverage of his new residential developments that often featured a demonstration/model home for members of the public and potential clients to visit during and after construction. By the end of World War 2, Mr. Tosch had built over 300 homes across fifteen residential developments



The 1928 Master Model Home at 288 Wimbledon Road, Irondequoit, under construction. Photo from the August 12, 1928 issue of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Photo of the completed exterior of the 1928 Master Model Home as published in the December 1928 issue of The New York Central Railways Magazine.

in the Rochester area. During that time he was a inaugural member of the Town of Irondequoit's Planning and Zoning boards and co-founded the Rochester Home Builders Association. In late 1945, he moved his business to Buffalo where he built several hundred more houses until his death in 1967.^[4]

Although the Master Model Home program and its corresponding Better Homes Movement were curtailed by

the Great Depression, they effected lasting change to the residential construction industry through their call for higher and consistent standards, efficiency in design, standardization of construction materials, and acknowledgement of the increasing autonomy of housewives and women in the household nationwide. In addition to these broader effects, they also catalyzed the ambition of Fred P. Tosch, a visionary contractor and

home designer who left an indelible mark on our community.

HB

Christopher Brandt will present on the life and works of Fred Tosch in more detail on May 5, 2019 at the Historic Brighton Spring Meeting.

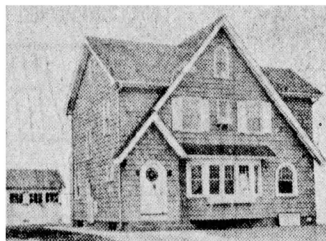
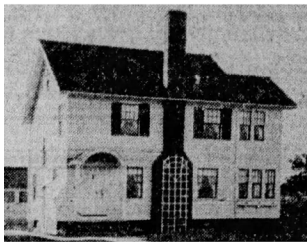
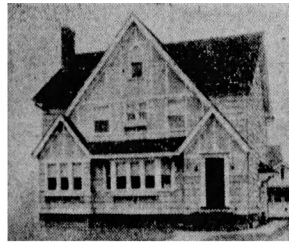
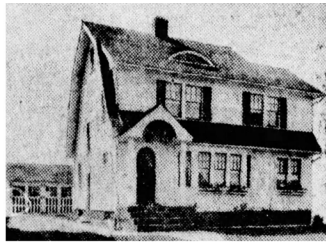
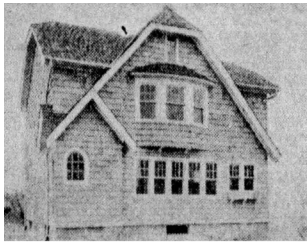
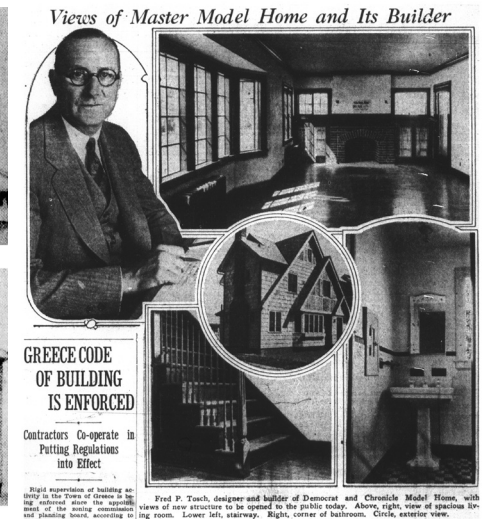


Photo montage of houses on Wimbledon Road shows the various different stylistic treatments employed by Tosch.



Above: Photo montage of the 1928 Master Model home on the opening day of the public exhibition. Photo from the September 9, 1928 issue of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Known Sources and Credits for Photos and Historical Materials:

•Mary K Rawlings:

1. Photo of MKR: <https://www.simonandschuster.com/authors/Marjorie-Kinnan-Rawlings/1825463>

•Fred P. Tosch and the Master Model Home:

1. Smith, Henry Atterbury, "Plans and Service Approved by the Press," The Books of A Thousand Homes: Volume 1, 3rd Addition, Brooklyn: Brooklyn Eagle Press, 1923. p.279
2. "Here's a Street of New Homes with Personality Plus!," Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, Sunday, May 8, 1927, p.15.
3. "He Lives on the Job - and His Prospects Generally End Up as His Neighbors," Democrat and Chronicle, February 3, 1929.
4. "F. P. Tosch Dies at 77; Was Builder," Buffalo Courier Express, October 24, 1967.

•The Aloha Restaurant:

1. <http://www.tikiroom.com/tikicentral/bb/viewtopic.php?topic=33074&forum=2>

HISTORIC BRIGHTON AT 20 YEARS OLD

A CELEBRATION OF HISTORY

It is hard to believe that HISTORIC BRIGHTON is about to celebrate its twentieth anniversary! Historic Brighton was founded in 1999 by a small group of Brighton citizens who sought to know more about their community's past and share it with all who wanted to learn. This group was aware that communities that have embraced their local history enjoyed enhanced economic stability and a stronger sense of place among its population.

With the help of the Landmark Society of Western New York, HISTORIC BRIGHTON was established as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit cultural organization. The Brighton Historical Society had ceased operation at this time and their remaining members joined as Charter Members of Historic Brighton. HB received its Permanent Charter from the State of New York Education Department in 2009. All work is carried out by its talented and hard-working Trustees and community members. All membership dollars are applied directly toward our mission.

No one could possibly imagine the depth and breadth of history that would be presented through its quarterly Newsletter/Journal and public programming. Thus far, Historic Brighton has presented over 80 public programs and 79 Newsletters encompassing all aspects of the Town's history and beyond. Most of these are offered free to the community through the generosity of our loyal membership. Our first speaker was former Congressman Barber B. Conable, followed by many notable authors, community leaders, and historians. Subjects included: the Seneca Indians, our neighborhoods and sites, local cultural and religious institutions, historic personages, architectural history, historic preservation and so many more. I hope you will visit our website: www.historicbrighton.org to read the past Newsletters. In 2019, we plan to publish a newly developed comprehensive index that will help you find specific information so that our archives might continue to be used to support community research.

Historic Brighton has proudly published books and booklets with the help of community grants. These include *East Avenue Memories*, by Elizabeth Brayer; three Salon Booklets, highlighting the work of several well-known local architects, and *Brighton Brick*, by Leo Dodd, a delightful illustrated history of Brighton's early brick industry.

We are proud of the accomplishments of our first twenty years. Our hope continues to be that all members of this community with a love for history and pride in this town will join Historic Brighton and keep the celebration going.

Arlene Vanderlinde
Historic Brighton Founder

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<i>Christopher Brandt</i>	<i>Julian & Marjorie Goldstein</i>	<i>Leigh Little</i>	<i>Neil Seely</i>
<i>Michael & Elizabeth Brandt</i>	<i>Barbara Jean Gottoroff</i>	<i>James & Susan Locke</i>	<i>Jean Shafer</i>
<i>Brighton Central School District</i>	<i>Diana Greene</i>	<i>Jerry Ludwig</i>	<i>Gary & Diane Shirley</i>
<i>Brighton Securities</i>	<i>Elaine Greene</i>	<i>Nigel Maister</i>	<i>George & Maria Sirotenko</i>
<i>Brighton Volunteer</i>	<i>Steve Greene</i>	<i>Joan Martin</i>	<i>James H. Sloan</i>
<i>Ambulance</i>	<i>Kathleen Grenier</i>	<i>Phyllis H. Masters</i>	<i>Elane & John Terepka Spencer</i>
<i>Philip Brown & Judith McLaud</i>	<i>Grinnell's Restaurant</i>	<i>Elizabeth McAnarney</i>	<i>St. John's Home</i>
<i>Joanne Bernardi & Dale Buralli</i>	<i>Marjorie Grinols</i>	<i>John McCabe</i>	<i>Frederick Stahl</i>
<i>Peggy Weston Byrd</i>	<i>Edward & Terry Grissing</i>	<i>Janet McKenna</i>	<i>Mary Stiff</i>
<i>Edward Carey</i>	<i>Mary Gulick</i>	<i>Greg & Connie Messner</i>	<i>Bob & Gayle Stiles</i>
<i>Margaret Carnall</i>	<i>Ann Haag</i>	<i>Suzanne Meyerowitz</i>	<i>Mary Ellen Sweeney</i>
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<i>Patricia Corcoran</i>	<i>Hannelore Heyer</i>	<i>Sarah Nemetz & Dr. Michel Berg</i>	<i>Joan Updaw</i>
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<i>Mary Critikos</i>	<i>Arthur Holtzman</i>	<i>Louise & Joel Novros</i>	<i>Jeff Vincent & Debbit Bower</i>
<i>Claire Curtis</i>	<i>Janet & Britton Hopkin</i>	<i>Katherine O'Donnell</i>	<i>Elaine Vitone</i>
<i>John & Susan Daiss</i>	<i>William Hosley</i>	<i>John Osowski</i>	<i>Judy Wadsworth</i>
<i>Laurence & Shelley Davis</i>	<i>Linda Hotra</i>	<i>David Penney</i>	<i>Joseph Watkins</i>
<i>Suzanne Delaney</i>	<i>Paul & Mariesa Howe</i>	<i>David & Marjorie Perlman</i>	<i>Sharon Weissend</i>
<i>Justin DelVecchio & Brenda Wonder</i>	<i>Michael Hryborenko & Marc Bauer</i>	<i>Connie Perry</i>	<i>James Weller</i>
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A “SOUTH SEAS PARADISE IN BRIGTON”: THE ALOHA RESTAURANT

By Matthew Bashore

At 2775 Monroe Avenue, Brighton once harbored a little slice of paradise. “Snow Spangled Mountains loom in in 3-D along the walls. In the center of the dimly lighted room, a footbridge strung with colored lights arches over a lagoon. Over in the corner, where the bar has been disguised as a little grass shack, you can almost expect the Skipper and Mary Ann (references to TV’s Gilligan’s Island) to come barging out from behind the palms... This is the forgotten land of Tiki torches and Pu Pu platters, of lurid-colored drinks with lethal alcohol levels...” wrote Patrick Farrell in a 1991 restaurant review in the Democrat & Chronicle. He seemed relieved that patrons of the recently reopened “New Aloha” would still, almost 30 years later, be “basking in Polynesian Paradise – the same Disney-ish islandscape that lit up the Aloha from it’s opening in 1963”.

“Tiki Bars” had existed since the 1930s starting with Don the Beachcomber’s Bar in Los Angeles and Trader Vic’s in Oakland California, the later where the Mai Tai cocktail was invented in 1944. However, the phenomenon really took America by storm in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, likely inspired by the success of Rodger & Hammerstein’s Broadway musical “South Pacific” (1949-54) an it’s subsequent film adaptation (1959) and the nationwide hoopla surrounding the 1959 admission of Hawaii to the U.S. as the 50th state. By the early 1960’s pop cultural America had “tiki-fever.”

Brighton’s “Adventure to the Exotic-Unusual” as an early ad stated, was opened in February of 1963, on a site that half a century earlier had been a long slim “island” of arable land squeezed south of Monroe Avenue and north of the Erie Canal. The Daily Record reported Chwan Shiou Sheu, Yu The Chi, and Florence Scancarello as the restaurant’s directors. A 1964 ad touted it as “Rochester’s newest Polynesian restaurant” that is “fast becoming a favorite spot for the ladies, as well as business men for luncheon from 95 cents.” Dinner was served daily from 3 pm. to 2 am. with entertainment every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings by the Williams Hawaiian Trio. The cuisine was a broad cultural mix, described in a later ad as

“superb oriental, Polynesian, Hawaiian food.”

Due to its size, exotic décor and economical pricing, the restaurant hosted countless social organization meetings, high school club outings, wedding rehearsal dinners and receptions. Louise Slaughter’s congressional predecessor, long-time U.S. Representative Frank Horton, was a frequent diner with both his family and staff. In November 1976, the republican congressman hosted 200 guests at an election-night victory celebration that lasted late into the evening.

The restaurant made the news in 1968 when “several pranksters stole a 500 lb. totem pole” from in front of the restaurant. However, cursed with remorse, the “Tiki-god pole” thief called police and admitted it was stolen by a group “after drinking too much.” Although he did not identify himself, he told the authorities of the tiki’s current location in a “driveway of a Brighton home” where it was recovered.

Although towards the end of its life the interior décor looked a little worn and dusty, it certainly was a delightful escape from a gray Rochester winter. While dining, guests might have overlooked that the fountains were quite loud, and groups fueled by several exotic drinks would be caught off guard when the periodic fountains would shut off leaving everyone in the restaurant talking for a short moment at very high volume.

In 1988, under new management, the Aloha became the Evergreen Oriental Chinese Restaurant, before being resurrected “under original ownership” in 1991 as the New Aloha, which closed only a few years later. The site is currently home to Sakura Home Japanese and Red Sun Chinese restaurants, where there are still fountains, and even a bridge. But along with much of our innocence, we seem to have lost much of our wonder at of the exotic magic that was the Aloha. Now it lives in the past. As Proust said, “The only true paradise is paradise lost.”

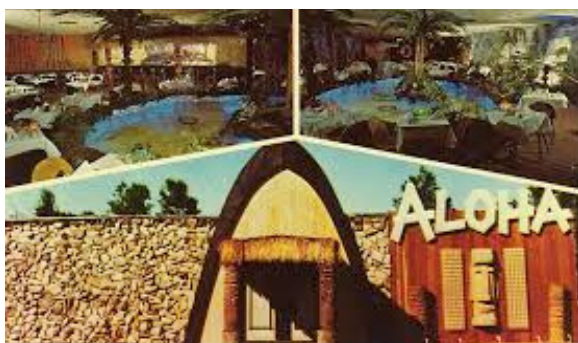
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Early postcard of the Aloha Restaurant