



HISTORIC BRIGHTON

Newsletter and Journal

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

Volume 20, No. 3

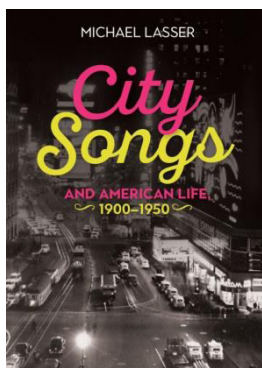
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Summer/Fall 2019

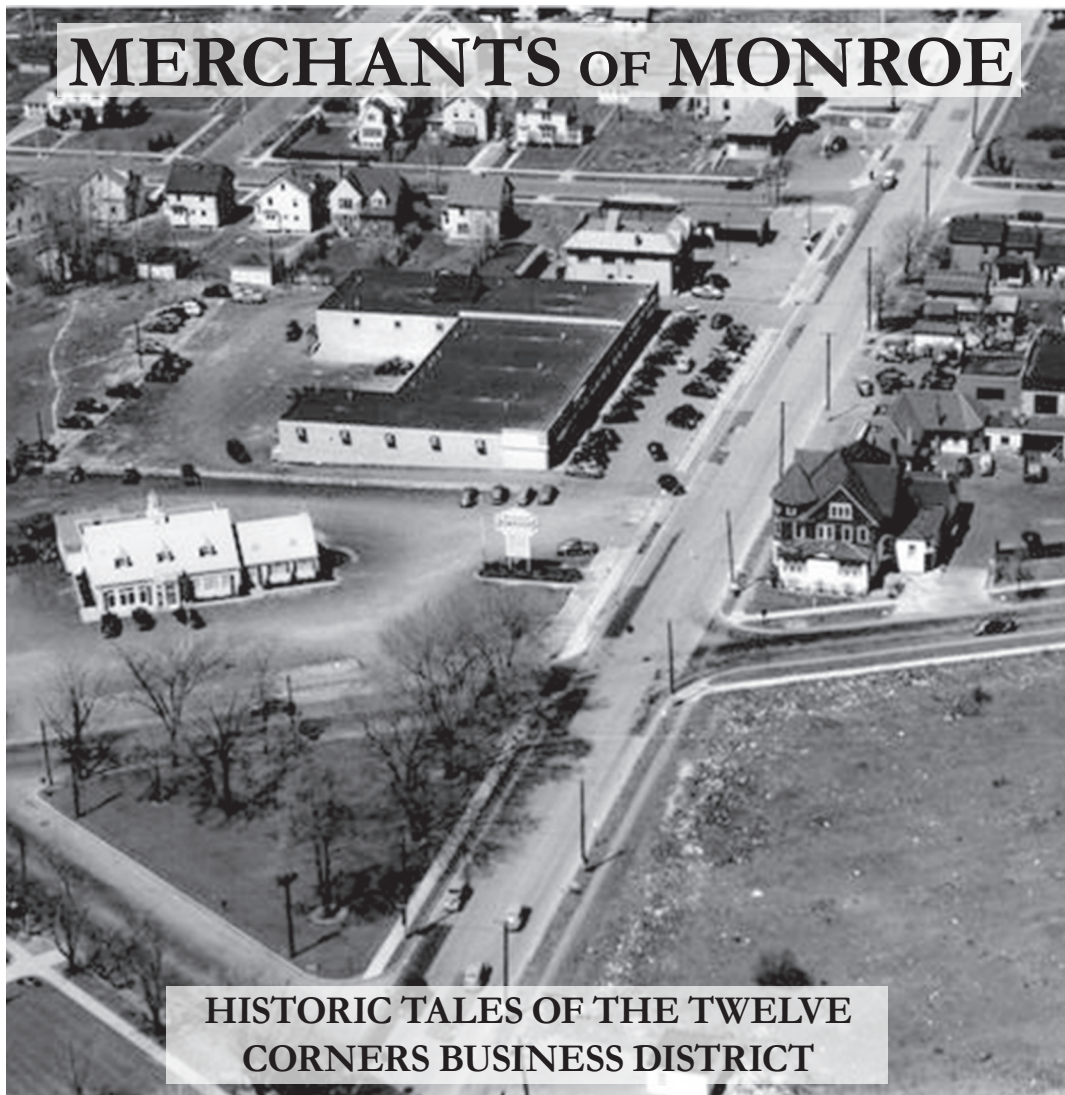
UPCOMING HISTORIC BRIGHTON EVENTS:

Halfway to Heaven and You: How Popular Songs Sang Us to the Suburbs:

Come join us on **Sunday, December 1st at 2:30 PM** at the **Brickstone Wintergarden**, for a musical journey through America's suburbs at the turn of the 20th century, as Americans moved out of growing cities and settled in suburban havens, told through the eyes and ears of one of Rochester's finest music historians, Peabody Award winning Michael Lasser. Book signing and refreshments to follow.



MERCHANTS OF MONROE



HISTORIC TALES OF THE TWELVE CORNERS BUSINESS DISTRICT

1941 aerial photograph of Twelve Corners, featuring Howard Johnson's (left), The Chateau (right), and the Brighton Commons plaza (center)

HISTORIC BRIGHTON FALL PROGRAM:

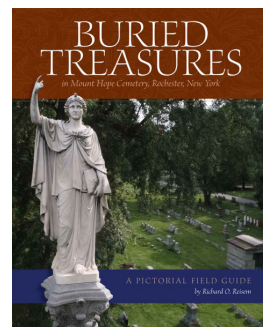
RICHARD O. REISEM PRESENTS:

“Buried Treasures in Mt. Hope Cemetery”

Sunday, October 13th, 2019 | 2:30 pm

Brighton Town Hall Main Auditorium | 2300 Elmwood Avenue, Rochester, NY

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



HISTORIC BRIGHTON FALL PROGRAM: RICHARD REISEM

Historic Brighton again welcomes Rochester author Richard O. Reism, bringing us a fascinating and highly informative look at his pictorial field guide, *Buried Treasures in Mount Hope Cemetery*.

The new 230-page field guide to historic Mount Hope helps cemetery visitors locate more than 650 burial sites of remarkable people - some well-known, others more obscure - and provides a biographical sketch for each one. The text is complemented by some 210 color images by photographers Don Hall and Historic Brighton Trustee Ron Richardson, showing cemetery

“residents,” important monuments, and the evocative landscape of America’s first municipal Victorian cemetery. Useful, easily read maps of each cemetery quadrant as well as a larger map of the whole cemetery will help visitors explore Mount Hope.

As Reism states in his introduction to *Buried Treasures*, “Official records reveal that about 350,000 people have taken up permanent residence here since the cemetery’s establishment. The range and diversity of the people whose stories are told provide a fascinating tableau of Rochester history.”

Author Richard O. Reism has written 16 books about history, architecture, and cemeteries since retiring from Eastman Kodak’s Office of Communications and Public Affairs. His books about Mount Hope Cemetery include a biography of Myron Holley (*Myron Holley: Canal Builder/Abolitionist/Unsung Hero*); *Gravestones in Mount Hope Cemetery*; *Frederick Douglass and the Underground Railroad*; and *Mount Hope: America’s First Municipal Victorian Cemetery*.

A book signing will follow the talk, Sunday, October 13 at 2:30 at Brighton Town Hall Auditorium.

FIGHTING A FIRE AT TWELVE CORNERS

By Mary Jo Lanphear

One hundred and two years ago, a long frame building on Monroe Avenue near the Twelve Corners burned to the ground. Although there was no human or animal loss of life, property damage was estimated at \$5,000 to \$7,500 (\$100,000-\$150,000 in 2019 dollars). Brighton Town clerk William Porter Surgenor, endeavoring to keep the fire from his grocery store next door, had burns to his hand that necessitated a trip by ambulance to Hahnemann Hospital.

The Monroe Cement Block Company had built a 200’ x 75’ frame building on the south side of Monroe Avenue on land owned by Howe & Bassett Plumbing contractors. Because clay is used in the manufacture of cement, the company was located near Brighton’s clay pits, long the source for its brick manufacturers as well. Although in 1917 the site was occupied by other businesses, local people still referred to the building as the “cement plant.” At the time of the fire, milk dealer Walter Bohm and gardener John DeWolf rented space in the large building. Bohm had four horses, some bobsleighs, and wagons in the building; DeWolf’s gardening tools were stored there also.

The fire was discovered about 9:00 AM* by George Holst, a farm laborer from Clover Street in Pittsford who rallied the local men. Soon it was apparent that the blaze was more than they could handle so they appealed to the city for help.

Rochester Public Safety Commissioner Andrew Hamilton sent Engine Company 15 from Monroe Avenue at Wilcox Street, which arrived in time to rescue the horses. They attached two hoses to a nearby hydrant on Monroe Avenue and in a half hour had the fire under control.

This incident, recorded in the *Democrat & Chronicle* on March 18, 1917, illustrates several major changes in emergency responsiveness in the Brighton of 1917 and the Brighton of 2019. First, until the Brighton Fire Department was founded in 1925, Brighton relied on the City of Rochester for fire-fighting and the city charged \$50 per fire. In 1927 Brighton Firehouse #2 was constructed on Elmwood Avenue near Winton Road. After that, fires in the vicinity of the Twelve Corners were handled with dispatch.

Doctors at the Hahnemann Hospital (now Highland Hospital) treated Porter Surgenor’s burned hand, but only after a call to the hospital for its ambulance. The city hospitals all had their own emergency vehicles. Hahnemann Hospital was the closest to the Monroe Avenue fire in 1917. Brighton Volunteer Ambulance, founded in 1982 at Winton and Westfall Roads, now serves all of Brighton including the Twelve Corners.

No mention was made in the newspaper article regarding the presence of the town constable, but perhaps he was present as a first responder. Not until 1930 did Brighton have its own police force headquartered at the town hall at 1795 Monroe Avenue. Today’s Brighton Police Department is also located at the town hall and responds to 9-1-1 calls from all over Brighton.

**The fire is assumed to have been discovered at 9:00 in the morning, however historical sources do not specify.*

—HB—

HENRY J. PECK: PRESERVING THE TWELVE CORNERS TRIANGLE

By Mary Jo Lanphear

Henry J. Peck was the youngest of the five children of Hiram and Martha Donnelly Peck, who came to Brighton in 1812 from Berkshire County, Massachusetts, the former location of many other early Brighton settlers.

The Pecks bought a farm on Elmwood Avenue. Henry was born in 1829 and attended the Clover Street Seminary under the aegis of Celestia Bloss before beginning a 40-year career in the nursery business with Chase Brothers in 1854. In 1868 he married Amelia S. Hart and they settled in a house on East Avenue in Brighton Centre.

The 160-acre Peck farm on Elmwood Avenue at the Twelve Corners devoted 100 acres to orchard stock, covering most of what is now the Virginia Colony neighborhood (formerly the "Struckmar Extension"). The original Peck farmhouse stood on Elmwood Avenue until it was razed in 1929 when the last 50 acres of the farm were sold. Remaining today is a tenant farmhouse further along Elmwood Avenue

that was for many years the home of Virginia Peck Little, granddaughter of Henry and Amelia Peck.

Henry J. Peck took an active role in local politics, serving as trustee for the Village of Brighton after its incorporation in 1885 and as alderman for the 21st ward of the city after the annexation of Brighton Village in 1905.

After Henry J. Peck's retirement from the Chase Brothers firm, he spent his days overseeing the three Peck farms in Brighton that included the original Twelve Corners acreage, the Little-Peck farm on Winton Road South, and the Buckland farm, also on Winton Road South in what is now the Danbury Circle area of Meadowbrook. His responsibilities required learning to drive a car at age 80. Caring for the flower gardens at his house in Brighton Village also occupied his time. Mr. Peck celebrated his 90th birthday in 1929. Among his gifts were flowers from William Pitkin, president of Chase Brothers Nursery. Henry J. Peck died in 1931 and was buried in

Brighton Cemetery.

In 1929, Mr. Peck (the owner of the land within the triangle at the Twelve Corners), and his agent Leonard Struck (who developed the Struckmar neighborhood at Winton Road and Highland Avenue), sought a permit from the town board to build a gas station in the triangle, in response to the board granting permission for such a business at another Twelve Corners site. When the town planning board was established in 1925, it made a rule that no gas station in Brighton could be within 300 feet of a school. Struck and Peck, with their lawyer, William F. Lynn, based their claim to a permit on the town board's 1925 affirmative decision for the other station. A petition from 125 town residents in opposition to a gas station in the triangle was presented to the Town Board at the February 13th, 1930 meeting. The Board received and filed the petition until street lighting was completed.

Finally, in 1937, the Brighton Town Board passed a unanimous resolution to buy the triangle from the heirs of Henry Peck for \$9,000. A Town purchase of the land removed fears of undesirable buildings or traffic hazards being erected on site, which under private ownership had been a constant concern.

A 1953 article in the Brighton-Pittsford Post states that the triangle was deeded to the town of Brighton by Henry J. Peck "who turned down an offer of \$7500 for a gas station." It would seem that, to the contrary, a conventional sale of property took place that benefitted both sellers and buyer.



Farmer Henry J. Peck beside two barrels of apples.

THE MERCHANTS OF MONROE: INTRODUCTION

By Raymond Tierney III

This is the initial chapter of a developing series of stories delving into Brighton's commercial roots - Monroe Avenue and Twelve Corners.

After the annexation of Brighton Village by the City of Rochester in 1905, Twelve Corners and Monroe Avenue replaced the village as the Town of Brighton's commercial and governmental hub. The area around the East Avenue/Winton Road intersection had long been the center of the town's activity. In addition to many businesses, one would have found the Town Hall, a train station and the post office. The annexation

referendum, decided by one vote, opened the door for the growth of the town's other commercial area at Twelve Corners. The next 100 years are filled with stories of people and events that helped shape our town today. Much of that can be attributed to the Merchants of Monroe.

As I literally grew up at Twelve Corners, I have selected an event that I experienced first hand at my father's grocery market as the initial chapter. Raymond Tierney Jr. opened Eagle Super Duper in the vacated Star Market in 1962, and helped trigger events that played out over the next 14 years. That event was the

challenge of smaller retail grocers to keep their stores open on Sunday. The Blue Laws that restricted sales of certain commodities on Sundays had not been enforced in many years. That began to change and Twelve Corners/Monroe Avenue became the epicenter of a battle to eliminate the antiquated law.

Authors Note: As this article includes my family, I have taken great care in telling the story. Much of what I include in the article was taken from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle archives, as my memory and my father's reluctance to brag about himself or criticize his competitors would have left me with quite a limited story. Enjoy!

THE MERCHANTS OF MONROE | CHAPTER I: THE BLUE LAWS

By Raymond Tierney III

The 1960's were a transitional time for Brighton's commercial hub, Twelve Corners. The retail landscape was changing with the development of nearby Pittsford Plaza.

One sector that was dramatically evolving was the retail grocery landscape. Star, Wegman's, Loblaws and A&P, each had a store on Monroe Avenue at Twelve Corners, and each opened newer, larger facilities farther up the road. In the midst of that retail upheaval, a controversial "blue law" that restricted certain retail sales on Sundays was challenged by the new proprietor of the vacated Star Market.

After Star Market moved to Pittsford Plaza in 1962, the vacated storefront reopened as Eagle Super Duper. The "new kid" on the corner wasted little time in making its presence felt when it stayed open on Sundays, despite neighboring larger grocery outlets closing per the traditional "blue laws".

A&P had decided to maintain its store

at Twelve Corners, while Wegman's had not yet decided to close their Twelve Corners Plaza store (which had opened in 1941, and ultimately did close in the shadow of the growing Pittsford location). The owner of the new Super Duper market was my father, Raymond Tierney Jr.

Tierney and other independent supermarket operators were eager to grow their market share by providing added necessary shopping opportunities to their customers. However, the growth of these smaller markets posed a new challenge for Wegman's - and independents like Tierney ultimately risked time in jail to defend their businesses against larger competition*.

However, antiquated NYS law limited retail sales on Sundays to products traditionally found in small 'mom and pop' stores, delis, and drug stores. None of those entities were a major threat to the profits of the large retailers and supermarkets. All that began to change

in the early 1960s as larger independent grocers began opening on Sundays, and one of the battlegrounds was Twelve Corners with its three supermarkets.

In 1961, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that "blue laws" restricting sales on Sundays were constitutional. The court referred the matter back to the individual states. New York State had such a law on the books, but it had not been enforced in many years. That began to change when the many small independent supermarkets were cited after complaints. Eagle Super Duper was one of the first of the independent supermarkets charged shortly after they opened in May of 1962. This specific complaint filed by Wegman's argued that if the Sunday sales were not curbed per the established law that Super Duper had violated, the larger stores would be forced to open for business to stay competitive**.

**Democrat & Chronicle 11/29/1962 "Variety Store Faces Blue Law Charge"*

***Democrat & Chronicle 11/11/62, "Blue Laws Issue Moral or Economic"*

The grocers who were operating on Sundays answered that seven-day-a-week food sales had been customary for a half-century, and had not yet disturbed the day's tranquillity.

Eagle Super Duper nonetheless restricted sales to items exempted by the law (see image below). I have very vivid memories of accompanying my father to work on Sundays and helping cover restricted items during this time. Just think, baby food was restricted, but beer was sold after noon!!

The lines were drawn. There was a coalition of chain supermarkets, downtown merchants and labor unions that advocated for strict enforcement of the archaic "blue laws". On the other side was the collection of independent supermarkets (like Eagle Super Duper), customers (over 3000 patrons of Hegedorn's IGA signed a petition to change the law), and faith groups who observed a different Sabbath, all of whom believed the

law was seriously flawed for a variety of economic and moral reasons.

In a strange case of irony, according to a D&C article in October of 1962, the Monroe County Food Merchants Association commended Wegman's for helping underscore the confusion surrounding the "blue laws". Many of the targeted stores, including Eagle Super Duper, were members of that association.

With the battle lines set, this matter would take years to resolve. In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to review a case against Hegedorn's IGA and Culp IGA who were indicted along with nine (including Eagle Super Duper) other firms in 1962. That essentially sent the matter back to the state once more, and ultimately left the decision to move forward to the Monroe County District Attorney.

It appears that the matter cooled off for a time, as 10 months later no action had been taken by Assistant

District Attorney Nicholas Varian, who was in charge of the case. The next noteworthy enforcement effort did not occur until several years later in 1966. However, in the meantime, several exceptions to the law had become evident.

In an article from the D&C on 11/18/65, stores that observe a different Sabbath could be open on Sundays, and stores run primarily by family were exempt. The article also noted that stores restricting items for sale were commonplace. The complexity and inconsistencies of the law were slowly being broken down - so slowly, in fact, that it would take a decade to resolve.

August 1966 found a new wave of store openings and enforcement. After a self-imposed Sunday closing for two weeks, the Eagle Super Duper store at Twelve Corners reopened its doors to customers. According to the D&C, on August 1st, 1966, Raymond Tierney Jr. said that reopening the store was meeting the demand of the area. He said, "no one should take my act as a flagrant overall violation of the law, as I'm just following a pattern. I've been open there for four years." He was in favor of the law as long as enforcement was universal. "This is a state law and I'm not operating any differently than the Wegman's in Canandaigua," he stated.

That same month a grand jury refused to indict three store owners. Later that month, The Town of Webster dismissed charges against Bruce Hegedorn stating that the law had "absurd contradictions."

By December of 1966, The Retail Merchants Council had backed away from complaints against grocery stores. The council's spokesman



SALES CURBED—Robert Dorschel, the manager of Eagle Super Duper Market at Twelve Corners, posts notice that the store is restricting its Sunday business. The Brighton market and

other independent grocery retailers say they will continue Sunday sales of food only. They maintain that food sales have been customary on Sunday for more than 50 years in Rochester area.

Excerpt: 11/11/1962 Democrat & Chronicle showing restricted items covered with sheets on Sunday

Lee McCanne announced: "We are concentrating on the general merchandise retailers." This effectively shifted the offensive side of the conflict to the downtown department stores, now against the suburban discounters. That battle would wage well into the 1970s.

A brief sidebar underscoring how crazy these times were: Oak Hill Country Club was required to obtain a special exemption in order to host the famed PGA golf tournament, which was scheduled to begin the final round on Sunday of the 1968 U.S. Open before 1:05 PM.

As the battle moved away from the Twelve Corners collection of supermarkets and toward a conclusion, there are certain ironies that came out of the ensuing conflict that cannot be ignored. By 1968, Star Markets and Wegman's both found themselves on the defensive, now being cited in complaints from large downtown retailers for violating the same laws they had previously favored when targeting independent supermarkets several years earlier. In a 1971 letter to the D&C, a writer thanked Wegman's for starting what she hoped would become a "new way of shopping life" (and indeed her wishes were fulfilled, as the once local grocer expanded into a nationally celebrated retail superstore - one of

the first open not only on Sundays, but 24 hours a day).

1973 found the Retail Merchants Council going full force against suburban stores. They were using the "blue laws" to keep from opening their own downtown locations. Sibley's and McCurdy's were sending representatives out to the suburbs to buy restricted items, and then file complaints against the entities technically selling them in violation of state law. A series of warrants were filed and even \$1000 bail was imposed on one retailer during the Christmas shopping season.

An article on 12/17/1973 summed up the absurdity: under the law, stores could sell tobacco, bread, milk, eggs, ice, soda water, fruit, flowers, confections - and even cemetery monuments - but they could not sell fresh meat! Sixteen stores were charged as the Monroe County District Attorney stepped up enforcement. "You can only disregard a law for so long, the 91 year old law has to be enforced," said Howard Relin. Many of these charges were ultimately dismissed as it became evident that the law was clearly outdated. Eventually, even the large department stores began to open their suburban branches. Thomas Edel of the Retail Merchant Council remarked in January 1974,

"If the 'blue laws' were repealed, I wouldn't be surprised if Sibley's has to close their downtown store someday." The end was near!

Later that year the highest court in New York State found the "blue laws" unconstitutional, and a final irony surfaced when one of the last stores indicted under the "blue laws" was Wegman's, on a complaint brought by the now-defunct McCurdy's. What had all started on Monroe Avenue in Brighton in 1962 was finally resolved. Eventually, Sundays became one of the busiest shopping days in the week. Sadly many of the independent supermarkets and large-scale downtown retailers alike have since closed for business permanently.

In conclusion, it is my hope that this series will be interactive. I would enjoy hearing from you about your recollections of Twelve Corners and Monroe Avenue. Your ideas on future articles will add great value to this Historic Brighton feature in future Newsletters. Also, encourage others to join our growing membership so they can enjoy our Newsletter and quarterly programs. Visit our website historicbrighton.org or feel free to contact me at rjtthree@aol.com

HB



... Sunday shoppers can buy Playboy, but not Tolstoy .

Right: a 1984 photograph of Raymond Tierney, Jr. at his Super Duper market

Left: a cartoon from the February 11, 1976 Democrat and Chronicle poking fun at the arbitrary parameters of the Blue Laws



A BRIEF HISTORY OF 'BLUE LAWS'

By Arlene Vanderlinde

We have lived with "blue laws*" all our lives and few have questioned their origin or their relevance in today's society. We have just endured the inconveniences.

As good citizens, we usually don't question the laws, but rather we follow them, figuring there must be some very good reason for their existence. Most blue laws have been repealed, but several states are still enforcing portions of these archaic laws, including New York State.

Modern-era "blue laws," also known as "Sunday laws," were designed to control or ban certain Sunday activities for religious reasons. Originally, they were enacted to promote a day of worship or rest. Trade unions and religious organizations championed these laws because they upheld both religious and working advantages to requiring a communal day of rest.

The first laws regulating public activities on Sundays were passed in colonial Virginia in the 1620s. Similar laws intended to keep the Sabbath

holy were soon adopted elsewhere in America. Puritan church members in the Massachusetts Bay colony, and later, Congregationalists elsewhere in New England, believed that their relationship with God required them to enforce proper behavior in their communities. This led to the enactment of a variety of laws designed to regulate the conduct of all members of society.

In its strictest sense, a "blue law" referred to an edict designed to regulate public activities on the Sabbath, which meant Sunday to the Congregationalists of that day. Eventually, the term "blue law" was expanded to include several different areas of behavior: All forms of trade were outlawed. Only church services were permitted on Sundays. Any form of entertainment on Sundays was banned. Except for emergencies, Sunday travel was not permitted. Violators were subject to fines imposed by civil authorities.

Efforts were made in many communities to provide social stability through this legislation. Husbands and wives were required to live together to keep families intact. Parents risked losing their children if it were found that the children were being poorly educated. The Puritans placed a heavy emphasis on the ability to read and understand the Bible, so great effort was expended to educate the

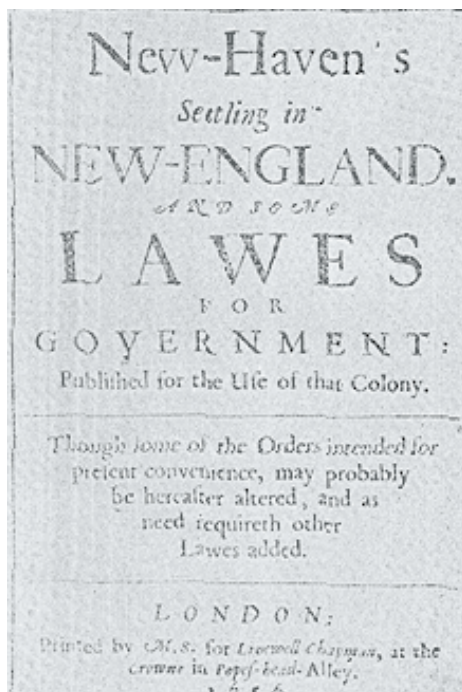
community.

Historically, community members found guilty of drunkenness, idleness or gossiping became the targets of public ridicule during their confinement in the stocks or pillory. Public displays of affection between the sexes, even between husband and wife, were prohibited.

During the Prohibition Movement of the early 20th century, America saw a resurgence of many of the old "blue laws." Many communities enacted Sunday closing laws, which prohibited businesses from operating on the Sabbath; other areas contented themselves with outlawing the sale of tobacco and liquor on Sundays. As a result, many Americans were fined or arrested for working, consuming alcohol, traveling, or partaking in recreational activities on Sundays. Remnants of the "blue laws" remain to the present day in select states, most notably in the restriction of certain sales on Sundays.

**The origin of the term "blue law" is disputed. A number of authorities have argued that some of the early laws, or a book describing the regulations, were printed on blue paper. Others suggest that the name is associated with "blue blood," a term conveying a disapproving view of common behavior."*

HB



Left: cover page from a Connecticut colony set of Sabbath restrictions from the year 1656



Above: an early cartoon mocking restricted sales

MALTOPS, HO-JO'S AND FLYING SWEDES: THE WESTERN WEDGE OF TWELVE CORNERS

By Matthew Bashore

Stand in the grassy triangle, perhaps in the shadow of the gazebo, and face west northwest across Winton Avenue to the slice of the six piece pie that makes up the Twelve Corners intersection. This wedge between Monroe and Elmwood now contains an urgent care facility, a small mall of shops, and a new healthy fast-food eatery. You are in the heart of Brighton, looking at what was once a playground of amusements that attracted thousands, a site of conflagrations and controversy, where nascent NFL players ran gridirons, biplanes flew, and composers dined.

If you had looked at this plot of hard clay soil 150 years ago, you would have noticed a square red-brick house on the corner of Monroe and Winton. This was the home of the son of Irish immigrants, Daniel Sheehan and his boisterous family: four sons, two daughters, and the occasional additional member of the extended Sheehan clan. But it was the land behind the house, known as Sheehan's Field, where the real excitement lay.

At the beginning of the 20th century, for less than a nickel, Rochesterians could board a city trolley from downtown to Cobb's Hill and walk down Monroe Avenue to Sheehan's Field, where there were always a variety of amusements, especially on Sundays when athletic games were banned within the city limits. We have records beginning in the 1890s of baseball games played here, between local teams like the Maltops, Premieres, Home Plates, X-rays, and Libertys, and against out of town rivals like the Syracuse Saltines, the Lyons Cubs and the Buffalo Dry Docks. Crowds were huge for a

field with no permanent stadium, just knock-together bleachers. In 1909, during the City Champion series, 5000 spectators watched the Maltops play the Home Plates. In an era of segregation, surprisingly both white and African-American teams played on the field. In May 1916, the all-black Douglass Giants opened their season by defeating "one of the strongest white baseball teams in the city," the El Toros, five to three.

There was also amateur, scholastic and semi-professional football. Most notable was the semi-pro Rochester Jeffersons, managed by the legendary Leo Lyons, one of the founders of the National Football League, with his team the "Jeffs" being one of eleven original members of the NFL. Crowds in the thousands were expected for the 1915 game against Buffalo, and extra trolley cars were added to accommodate the spectators. During these first decades of the 20th century, Sheehan's Field also hosted soccer games, Gaelic football, and the occasional boxing match.

Of course, there also were plenty of hijinks associated with the events. The Hobart football team once painted "Beat Rochester" in huge yellow letters on the side of one of the green trollies. Most teams met up before the game, celebrated their victories and tried to forget their defeats, at Daniel Sheehan's Hotel and tavern just across the street where the Rochester & Eastern trolley stopped. It is likely that Mr. Sheehan did not make as much profit on the leasing of his field as he did

at his bar across Monroe Avenue. There were reports of riots over bad umpire calls or other unsportsmanlike conduct which usually had been settled peaceably, or otherwise, by the time the authorities arrived, with the suspects and witnesses cordially imbibing at Sheehan's bar, unable to recall the details of the dispute for the officers.

After the First World War, as the surrounding fields and orchards and the large local brickyards were transformed into the suburban housing tracts we see today, Twelve Corners lost its rural atmosphere. Rochester City ordinances restricting ballgames had changed, and many athletic events were moved closer to the crowds in the city. With the popularization of the automobile, spectators were also no longer tied to the trolley lines. In 1927 the now elderly and "incompetent" Daniel Sheehan sold his hotel across the street, and his wife Anna came up with other ways to attract the crowds to the field behind their home.

In summer 1919, Swedish aviator Filip Bjorklund landed his Max-Smith biplane at Sheehan's Field and set to taking the area residents up on short flights. The Democrat & Chronicle predicted regular passenger service to be started from here under the newly formed Rochester Aerial Services Company, however Sheehan's Field ultimately did not become Rochester's first airport. Carnivals and Field Days were held here throughout the 1920s, and the occasional ballgame was still reported. In 1930, Anna Sheehan took advantage of the national miniature golf craze by

building her own on the site next to a pre-existing “obstacle course.” Ads proclaimed parking for a thousand cars and a free chicken dinner at the hotel for the week’s lowest score. In 1938, the Town of Brighton considered but ultimately rejected the acquisition of Daniel Sheehan’s house and acreage at a price of \$40,000 as a site for a much needed Town Hall.

However, the busy intersection in a rapidly growing town was a prime



Bjorklund and Roch. Aerial Services Co. Members circa 1919



Swedish Aviator Filip Bjorklund, circa 1919

opportunity for retail shops. In early 1940, the Sheehans’ son James and daughter Ethel began construction of a building to house eight stores including an A&P “super-market” on the Monroe Avenue side of the property. In late July 1940, they sold the corner acre and a half, fronting Winton Road, for \$40,000. The land was purchased by the R.U. Wilson Corporation, headed by Richard Wilson. Richard was the son of Joseph R. Wilson, president of the Haloid Photographic Co., which became the Xerox Corporation, and the brother of Joseph C. Wilson, founder and president of Xerox. The Sheehans’ century-old brick homestead and an adjacent roadside stand were torn down to build a Howard Johnson’s restaurant.

At a construction cost of \$50,000, Howard Johnson’s opened on the site in late 1940. An early franchise restaurant, there were 133 other Howard Johnson restaurants at the time the Brighton one opened. Eventually there would be a thousand nationwide. Howard Johnson’s, also known colloquially as Ho Jo’s, were full service restaurants, most noted for their fried clams and 28 flavors of ice cream. They were recognized by their signature orange tile

roof, adorned with an aqua-blue roofed cupola, and crowned with a weathervane depicting cutouts of Simple Simon and the Pieman, the company’s logo.

Of the 200 Howard Johnson’s restaurants that existed at the start of the war, by 1944 all were forced closed but twelve, due to war rationing. However, Brighton’s did not close, and the 200 seat restaurant flourished in the post-war years, becoming a community center for the town. A 1949 menu lists it as the headquarters of the Kiwanis Club (Tuesdays at 12:15) and the Brighton Republican Club (3rd Wed. at 8:30). Its proximity to the public schools at Twelve Corners ensured a steady stream of students coming through the doors. But not all the clientele were bobbysoxers. One of the regulars was the internationally renowned composer Howard Hanson, who taught at the Eastman School and lived nearby on Oakdale Drive. In 1997, his former neighbor, Alice Brzustowitz reminisced, “Dr. Hanson and his mother always ate their evening meal and Sunday dinner at Howard Johnson’s. Mrs. Hanson told me many times how they sat all Sunday morning waiting until it was time to go to their meal”.



Howard Johnson’s restaurant at Twelve Corners, circa 1950

In 1964, Richard Wilson sold the restaurant to the Smith Williams company of Buffalo, and a couple of years later Howard Johnson’s was remodeled at a cost of \$200,000, adding additional seating and what is described as a “cactus canyon” stone front to the façade. At about the same time, a US post-office building was constructed on the southwest edge of the former Sheehan plot. The stores were busy as Brighton continued to expand in the mid-century economic boom.

In 1962, in the building where the A&P had once been, Tierney's Super Duper market had opened. Fox's Delicatessen had also moved to the plaza the same year.

On an early February evening in 1974, Twelve Corners likely saw more excitement and crowds than it had since the Sunday games at Sheehan's Field. A broken gas main in the ceiling above Fox's Deli triggered a smoky fire that emptied the stores and soon erupted into flames that spread through the false ceiling. Hundreds of firemen from Brighton and all the neighboring communities were summoned and fought the towering flames for hours in the bitter cold and snow. When it was over, most of the stores were damaged beyond salvation. Damages were estimated at \$1 million. Two firemen were injured. However, the shopping plaza was to rise from the ashes. It was rebuilt in 1975 as Brighton Commons Mall, a sprawling two level brown brick edifice with orange signs in modish Bauhaus letters.

In 1985, the Howard Johnson's Restaurant was sold to Buffalo father and son Dino and George Stathe who operated it under the name Howard's, until it was rechristened the Princess Restaurant in 1987. Though no longer orange-roofed and missing its cupola, the brown and beige Princess continued to be a community center for the town, hosting the Kiwanis and other civic organizations. A 1980s Brighton High student called it a "major hang out spot for students." It was open 24 hours a day, and inspired a 1992 Brighton-Pittsford Post article by Jeffrey Thomas entitled "Offering up a slice of late night Brighton" which describes the unusual post-nightclub crowd of vampires, rock-star wannabes, and

drag queens. But, the coffee, pie and French fries ordered by students and aging Brighton socialites made the economics of running a 24-hour full-service restaurant difficult for the Stathe family, and then came an offer that was difficult to refuse.

In the late 1990s, the large drugstore chains, like Walgreens, Rite-Aid, and CVS, were leaving the malls and plazas and acquiring parcels of land in high-traffic areas to build large freestanding stores. Across the country many historic structures were razed as a part of this trend, and organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the American Institute of Architects, the Preservation League of NY, and the Landmark Society had articles and held symposiums on the topic. Developer Frank Rinaldi wanted to build a Rite Aid drugstore at Twelve Corners. This would mean demolition of the Princess Restaurant and another nearby building housing the Bagel Bin, and Mail Boxes Etc. The five acre parcel's owner James Biben and the management of the Princess supported the idea, but the community did not. In fact, the community, led by Neighbors United, was outraged at the loss of this town community gathering place.

A grassroots campaign was started in 1997 to block the drugstore in favor of another restaurant at the site; this included petitions, a failed attempt at

landmark status for the Princess, a threatened boycott of businesses that supported the development, and a rally at Town Hall with dissenters carrying signs that said "Rite Aid is Wrong Aid" and "If you build it, we won't come." Rochester Mayor, Bill Johnson, who was a regular customer of the Princess, wrote to Town Supervisor Sandra Frankel in support of the retention of the restaurant, calling it a "Brighton jewel." The developers fought back with lawsuits and press campaigns, and made concessions to the original plan, including increased greenspace, exterior redesign to blend more with surrounding structures, and the addition of a 90 seat restaurant in the planned structure. During the storm of controversy, the Princess closed in July 1998, the Bagel Bin moved into the renovated post office building that had sat vacant since 1995, and that became that era's community hub. The Rite Aid opened in 1998, but only lasted a decade, closing in 2008. The Bagel Bin closed in 2011.

Despite the many changes these five acres of Brighton clay have seen, you can still sit down to a meal, stroll with an ice cream cone, and sit on a bench and chat with a neighbor. And if you listen closely, you still might hear the crowd roar at the Jeffs or the Maltops on Daniel Sheehan's Field.

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THE CHATEAU RESTAURANT

By Jeff Ludwig, *reprinted with permission from the Democrat and Chronicle*

According to Brighton Town Historian Mary Jo Lanphear, the Chateau Restaurant, once a Twelve Corners anchor, was infamous for its ambiguity. Depending on whom one asked, Lanphear notes, the Chateau operated variously as “a restaurant, a nightclub, a speakeasy, or an after-hours joint.” Either way, she concludes, “the building’s shady history is tied to the development of the Twelve Corners as a town center.”

Shady or not, the Chateau certainly had an outsized reputation. Over the course of its history, the venue, located on the northwest corner of the Monroe Avenue and Winton Road intersection, cultivated a rambunctious vibe. Among other colorful episodes, it was the site of arrests, raids, brawls, and often rowdy entertainment.

Belying this ill-famed reputé, the Chateau is seen here as it appeared on a tranquil day in March 1950.

A precursor of the Chateau opened for business circa 1890. The Queen Anne-style establishment was called, quite simply, “Sheehan’s Hotel.” In addition to being known for its food and strong drink, the hotel sponsored live music and dancing.

Sheehan’s Hotel was also the site of barroom fights and robberies, and the proprietor himself occasionally landed

in legal trouble. Owner Daniel Sheehan was arrested in 1902, for example, after waving a weapon at town workers who were removing snow outside of the hotel.

Albert Michaels carried on Sheehan’s traditions after buying the property in 1925. Adopting the name “The Chateau,” Michaels presided over a hard-drinking atmosphere renowned for its spectacular live entertainment. Not only did the Chateau showcase local talent, but it also booked national travelling acts including comedians, burlesque and vaudevillian performances, and troupes like the Jewel Box Review, a drag show of “female impersonators.”

Moreover, the Chateau was a popular haunt for celebrity-spotting. It hosted such talents as Kate Smith, “Cowboy” Buck Jones, Milton Berle, Joe Penner, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, and Texas Guinan. Unconfirmed rumors allege that even Frank Sinatra made a cameo at one point in the Chateau’s history. Portraits of every star that appeared were mounted proudly on the tap room’s walls.

Unfortunately, Michaels too ran afoul of the law during his ownership tenure. In the Prohibition era, his establishment was subject to a raid in which 22 people were arrested.

Yet, ironically, Michaels and the Chateau survived Prohibition, the Great Depression, and the hardships of the

Second World War only to succumb to the larger cultural forces of prosperity. By the 1950s, profits were in sharp decline.

“In the days before...television and bowling, this was a flourishing business,” Michaels lamented in the summer of 1957. Alas, as he wistfully elaborated, “since people have found other recreations than going to nightclubs, the type of entertainment provided by the Chateau must pass with the times.”

It did. Michaels closed and razed the Chateau later in 1957. A gas station and parking lot arose in its place.

Although the Chateau has now been gone for nearly 60 years, one can still imagine its shape, and alcohol-soaked legacy, looming over Twelve Corners lore. As one anonymous former patron penned in a 1957 farewell ode:

To a Departing Landmark

*No beer, no wine, no neon sign.
No dance, no dine, no checks to sign.
No trumpet blow, no girls, no shon.
No go no mo’, no Chateau.*

Jeff Ludwig, Historical Researcher, City of Rochester, for Retrofitting Rochester, in partnership with the Office of the City Historian, 2018. Mr. Ludwig is now the Education Director for the Seward House Museum in Auburn.

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Known Sources and Credits for Photos and Historical Materials in this issue:

1. Mary Jo Lanphear (Brighton Town Historian).
2. Democrat & Chronicle archives (via Monroe County Library).
3. Patrick J. Mahoney, “*The Long and Ambiguous History of Connecticut’s Blue Laws.*”
4. An Antiquarian “*Quaker Laws of Plymouth and Massachusetts; Blue Laws of New York, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina.*”



The Chateau Restaurant in the winter, circa 1950

THE BRICKS OF BRIGHTON

By Mary Jo Lanphear

In nineteenth century Brighton, the two major occupations were agriculture and brickmaking, the latter utilizing an extensive bed of clay in the center part of town. Some of the early settlers to Brighton came from communities in New England and New York State where brickmaking was important. They discovered the raw material for bricks on land along Monroe Avenue and began small factories there, finding a market for bricks in the boomtown of Rochester.

In 1853 the owners of those small brick works formed the Rochester Brick & Tile Company, pooling their land and resources. The first trustees were Gideon and William Cobb, Edwin Wilson, Alvin Burton, Jason Baker, and Stephen Otis of Brighton; Clark Johnston and Azariah Boody of Rochester; and William Otis of Gates. The new company owned most of the land on both sides of Monroe Avenue from Highland Avenue to the Twelve Corners. By 1855 its 100 employees were using steam power to produce annually 12 million bricks valued at \$60,000. The workers' average monthly wage was \$20.00. Many were German and Irish immigrants who lived in company housing or stayed with Timothy Madigan at his boarding house on East Avenue in Brighton Centre. Madigan's establishment later became "The Brighton."

Initially capitalized with \$70,000, the Rochester Brick and Tile Company thrived in the second half of the nineteenth century and recapitalized at \$84,000 in 1870. In 1888 it covered 250 acres of land and employed

200 workmen. In addition to large quantities of terra cotta drain tile, it manufactured 15 million bricks a year. Tubular drain tile buried in farmers' fields drew off standing water and prevented plant damage.

In 1897, the company hired James Crouch to appraise the real estate and Joseph Cowles to appraise the machinery. Buildings, barns, and kilns were valued at \$84,028. Engines, boilers, pumps, and pulleys were appraised at \$15,865.

On June 15, 1897, the cost of producing 33,000 bricks a day at the Rochester Brick and Tile Company yard was \$52.05, this amount reflecting the wages for twenty-seven men and four boys and the cost of coal.

In 1902, the board of directors of the R B & T voted to reduce the size of the board from nine members to five. In 1911 the directors mortgaged the 235 acres owned by the company for \$30,000.

By 1912, brick production at the yard began to decrease and at the same time, the demand for housing in Brighton began to increase as public transportation and the private automobile made it possible for workers and shoppers to live in the country and commute to the city.

The clay that had sustained brickmaking in Brighton for one hundred years was depleted.

In 1918 the Monroe Avenue Land and Improvement Company purchased the

brick lands for the new development of Rose Lawn. The RB&T engines, track, equipment, and livestock moved to Fishers, New York, where the business continued for several more years. RB & T officially ceased operations in 1953.

On July 26, 1918, the Wilford Kiln chimney was toppled and its 675,000 bricks salvaged by a purchaser from Massachusetts. One hundred ten feet tall and twenty-five years old, it had replaced the original chimney built in 1858. A large crowd of spectators watched the implosion and saw the chimney cap fly to Eastland Avenue. Three weeks later a similar demolition took down the chimney for the RB&T power plant.

It is said that, as a parting token of appreciation for their faithful service, the brick workers' homes were moved further out on Monroe Avenue at the expense of the Rochester Brick & Tile Company. Business buildings, apartments, and houses replaced the kilns and locomotives of the brickyard, paving the way for the development of the Twelve Corners as the commercial center of Brighton.



Leo Dodd's 2002 watercolor painting of the brickyards