



HISTORIC BRIGHTON

Newsletter and Journal

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

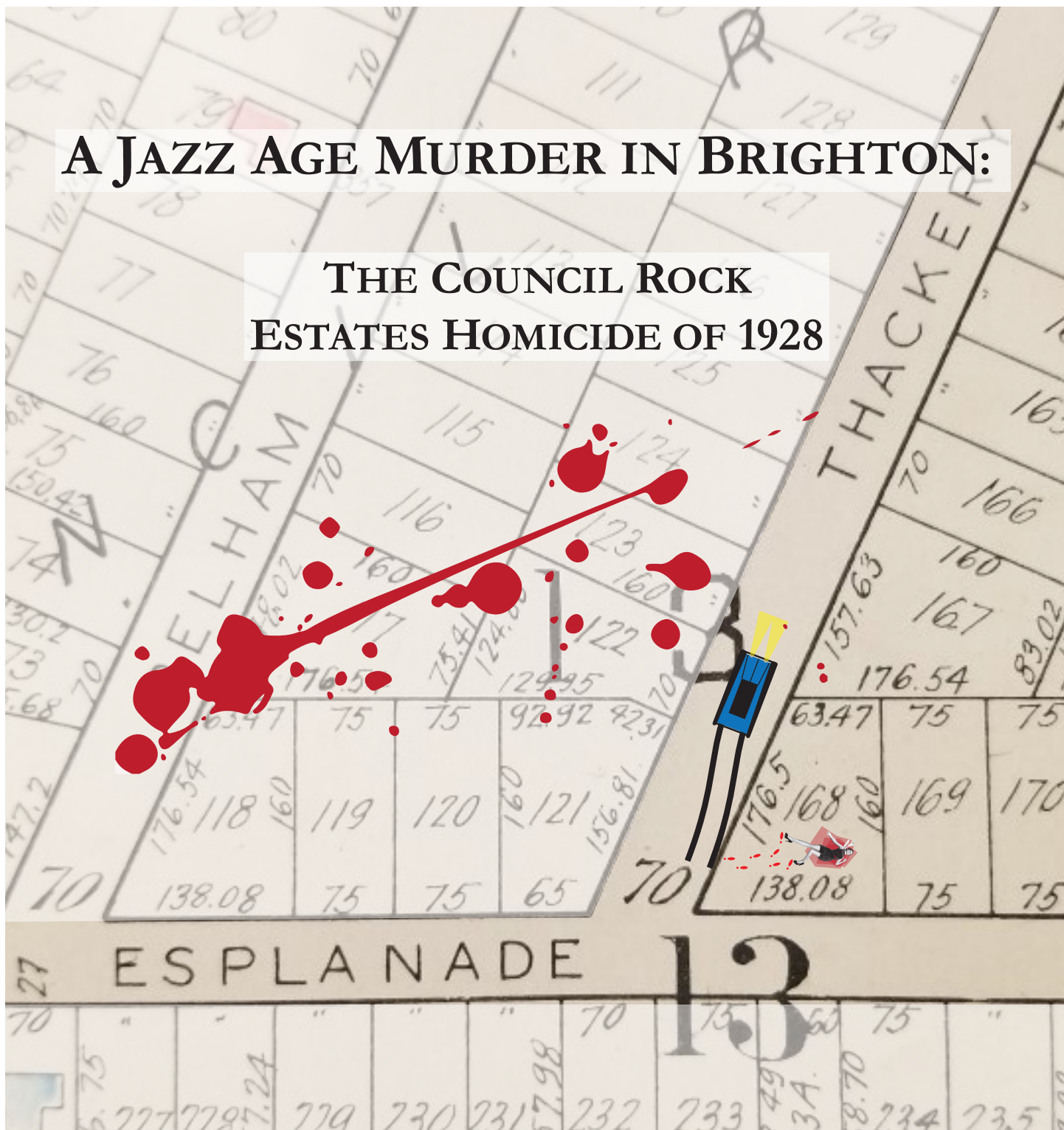
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A JAZZ AGE MURDER IN BRIGHTON:

THE COUNCIL ROCK ESTATES HOMICIDE OF 1928



THE BLUE-COUPE MURDER: A JAZZ AGE TRAGEDY AT COUNCIL ROCK ESTATES

By Matthew Bashore

She lay face-up on the icy lawn in one of Brighton's newest, most exclusive neighborhoods. Just moments before, he had seen her leap from a car, run, and fall. He jumped from his delivery van and ran towards her as the blue coupe drove off, the passenger door still swinging. He was Paul Lambert, age 23, and he worked for Kelso Laundry, one of the big laundry services downtown that brought the freshly washed table linens, the starched shirts, and the gently pressed dresses to the homes of the businessmen and professionals who had recently built homes in the new Council Rock Estates neighborhood.

Paul thought the woman might have been the victim of an "automobile hawk" as carjackers were then called; he thought she might have tripped when she jumped, or maybe was pushed, from the vehicle. He didn't realize that from his van, he had witnessed the last frightened moments of her life. As he began to lift her from the cold ground, he saw the blood, a lot of blood running from a wound on the back of her head. She was still breathing, mumbling, and then her breathing stopped. There was now blood on his hands. Because of her thick winter clothes he hadn't noticed the other more serious wound, the fatal wound, in the woman's abdomen.

It was Wednesday, November 28th, 1928, the day before Thanksgiving; cold, grey, and miserable. The early snow had mostly melted, but an icy drizzle fell as the police cars and the coroner's van arrived at the corner of Thackery Road and Esplanade Drive. Rochester police detectives Faulk and Fox had arrived first, along

with Al Moss, a reporter for the Rochester Times-Union, but this was Brighton, outside RPD jurisdiction and the Monroe County Sheriff was summoned and soon on his way. Near the dead woman's body, Fox and Faulk found an oily towel, and Faulk and the reporter found two brass bullet shells that looked like ones from a small caliber rifle. Soon Chief Deputy Sheriff Thomas Woods, Deputy Sheriff Fagan, and County Coroner Dr. David Atwater arrived and took charge of the investigation.

Paul Lambert, the laundry van driver, the only apparent witness, was interviewed. He told the detectives the story of the young woman and the mysterious blue coupe. He said he was driving behind the car on Esplanade, then it turned on Thackery and pulled to the curb. No, he did not hear gunshots. No, he was not sure of the make of the car, "possibly a Buick?" No, he did not get the license number. He had been focused on the woman.

The coroner briefly examined the body; there was no ID in her clothing. The weather got worse, and it was getting dark. The small group decided there was nothing else to be done here. The body of the unknown girl was loaded into the coroner's hearse and taken to the morgue downtown on Clarissa Street.

The body on the table was a twenty-six-year-old Caucasian woman with dark bobbed hair. The coroner began the autopsy. The bullet had not penetrated the brain, but as with most head wounds, there had been a lot of blood. It was the abdomen wound that had caused severe



Photograph of Inez Smead

internal bleeding and resulted in her death. Just as the autopsy had begun, a well-dressed man with a toothbrush mustache arrived. The dapper gentleman was Maurice J. Joyce of 162 Council Rock Ave., a real estate developer and contractor. He identified the woman on the autopsy table as his downstairs maid and cook. She had worked in the Joyce home for the last four months. They finally knew who the identity of the victim. Her name was Inez Smead.

The Smeads, father Clarence, mother Florence, four girls including Inez, and the baby boy Elwyn, had lived a hardscrabble, peripatetic existence. Inez had been born in Ithaca in 1903, but by 1905 the family had moved to Buffalo's 8th ward, then to the farm of Inez's grandfather Hartwell Smead outside Warsaw, NY. Inez's mother was a hard-working, church-going woman who stoically suffered in private when she fell ill in 1913. Few friends and neighbors even knew she was poorly when Florence died four days after giving birth to another girl who also did not survive. Inez was only 10 years old. The family fell apart. Inez's three-year-old



Joyce Residence, where the victim Inez Smead was employed

brother Elwyn was adopted by Mr. & Mrs. Lonson Rodgers of nearby Pavilion, NY. Although the motive may have been more altruistic, especially given Elwyn's young age, it was not uncommon at the time for childless farmers like the Rodgers to adopt young boys for the farm labor they would eventually provide. Inez's father quickly remarried and moved north to Rochester. Inez soon entered a career as a live-in domestic worker in LeRoy and Batavia, but would also call Mr. & Mrs. Rodgers's farm her home, visiting on weekends and holidays. Inez's father and his second wife were living in Greece, NY, when he was notified of his daughter's murder.

Detectives accompanied Inez's employer, Maurice Joyce back to his home in Council Rock Estates. They interviewed the Joyce's other live-in domestic Kate Mader, who served as upstairs maid and nurse to the Joyce's

newborn son. Miss Mader said Inez had left the home to go for a walk shortly after two o'clock, about an hour before her murder. Newspapers and their readers ate up what Miss Mader said next, that Inez Smead had predicted her own demise. Just days before, she had given Miss Mader a list of people to contact in case "something terrible happened to me." The detectives examined Miss Smead's bedroom and found a diary. The diary mentioned many boyfriends and her feelings for them. They wondered: could one be her killer?

The next day four of the boyfriends mentioned in her diary were brought in for questioning. According to the Democrat & Chronicle, the young men did not take the events very seriously, one of them even quipping to another that he was now "too late" for his date with Inez. However, in the midst of the jocular set, one

man in particular stood out: Herman Oltman. Inez and Herman "had been engaged, having known each other for three years." They had attended church together, and had dined at Rodgers's home together. But, last summer they had quarreled and parted. Since that time they had met again, and according to her diary, Miss Smead told him she "had lost her love for him." Oltman was questioned. He said he owned a blue coupe and a .22 caliber rifle. They put him in a jail cell.

Wednesday evening, the day of the shooting, at the same time Miss Smead's autopsy was just beginning, Rochester Police were called to a home on Almeroth Street for another shooting. Mrs. Gussie Miller had been shot through her right arm when answering the doorbell. She recognized the man who had shot her. Though not related to her, his name Joseph August Miller. Friends called him "Goat." Mrs. Miller, although married, described Goat as a "rejected suitor." He had fled the scene, and police were now on the lookout for him.

Earlier that night, State Troopers had found Goat Miller alone, asleep in a blue Chrysler coupe by the side of the road in Clarence, NY, with a half-empty bottle of liquor and a loaded .22 rifle resting on the passenger seat. A blanket found in the car had a bullet hole through it. It was soon determined that he had stolen the car from a Mr. Tom Toolan in Rochester on Tuesday night, and was involved with the shooting assault of Mrs. Gussie Miller. While held in the Williamsville jail, Goat Miller tried to slit his wrists with a torn tin coffee cup. Bandaged, the distraught prisoner then tried to hang himself. Jailers had him transported to the Buffalo

City Hospital. Police soon wondered if Miller had something to do with the shooting death of Inez Smead. Four detectives were dispatched on Thanksgiving afternoon to bring him back to Rochester.

Detectives also went to a small house at 783 Goodman Street, where Miller lived with his German-speaking mother. They showed her the towel found at the murder scene on Thackery Road. The 62-year-old widow identified the towel as being one of a set her son had won in a raffle. Meanwhile, detectives also drove to Batavia and checked out the alibi of Inez's former fiancé Herman Oltman. He claimed he was working on his car at a garage there from 1 until after 5 the afternoon Inez was shot. Two mechanics who were with him confirmed his story.

Goat was interrogated, but insisted he did not know the murdered girl. Yet, he could not account for his whereabouts on the afternoon of the murder. Capt. McDonald reported Miller had been on a drunken spree for the last ten days, consuming a quart of bootleg liquor daily. His memories were vague and disjointed. Now there were two suspects, both with blue coupes, and both with .22 caliber rifles - one with a strong motive but with a good alibi, the other with the means but no motive.

Goat Miller seemed the more likely suspect. He had a criminal past, had been arrested five times for various offenses including public intoxication, reckless driving, petty larceny, and burglary in 1916 at the age of 20, he and two other young men broke into a shoe store. As demonstrated by his recent drunken spree, his car theft, his attack on Mrs. Miller, and jail cell suicide attempts, he was a troubled and violent man. But there was no

mention of Mr. Miller in Inez Smead's diaries, and no one who knew Inez or Miller could connect the two. So why would he kill her?

As Oltman and Miller languished in jail cells, and police tried to gather evidence and make connections, Inez Smead was laid to rest near her mother in Pavilion Center Cemetery. Sheriff's deputies attended the solemn ceremony and showed the mourners a woman's brooch found in the Chrysler coupe that Miller was driving. No one could identify it as belonging to Inez. With the alibi from the garage mechanics, and Miller as the more likely suspect, Inez's one-time fiancé Herman Oltman was released.

Sheriff Albert H. Baker tested the .22 Stevens rifle found in Miller's car by firing out a window of the detective division at a brick wall. In a cursory comparison, the shells seemed identical to the casings found in Thackery Road. Miller's rifle matched the casing and the bullet retrieved from Miss Smead's body.

Sheriff Baker took the empty shells found at the scene to a ballistics expert in Detroit. However, ballistic science being what it was at the time, the expert couldn't verify the casings came from the same gun. They had a similar gun, a similar car, a similar towel, similar oil on the towel, Miller's unexplained



Suspect Herman Oltman, who provided an alibi with witnesses at the time of the murder



Site of shooting (bold outline), lot 168, corner of Esplanade Drive and Thackery Road

whereabouts at the time of the murder, the fact he shot another woman that same afternoon. But it was all circumstantial, and there was nothing to link Miller to Inez. Miller was interviewed repeatedly but claimed no knowledge of the woman or the shooting. Twice, a grand jury failed to issue an indictment for the woman's murder. He was released on bail and went to stay at his sister's farm in Brighton. He was unbalanced and paranoid, believing that his family was poisoning his food, and when an airplane passed overhead he believed



Suspect Joseph "Goat" Miller, who remained the prime suspect when he was unable to account for his whereabouts at the time of the murder

it was the police keeping track of him. Mrs. Gussie Miller, who Goat had shot through the arm on the same Wednesday that Miss Smead was murdered, did not wish to cooperate with the District Attorney. She disappeared a few weeks before Miller's trial on assault, and despite a subpoena, threats of prosecution and a night in jail, she never testified. Her motives are unknown. It could have been out of fear of Goat Miller, the associated publicity of a married woman likely involved in an adulterous relationship or just a latent fondness for her former sweetheart. However, Tom Toolan, whose blue coupe Miller had stolen and used to transport him on his drunken shooting spree, did seek justice. In late August 1929, Joseph Goat Miller pled guilty to auto theft grand larceny and was sentenced to 7-14 years in state prison. However, the Inez Smead murder was now cold.

Three years later, on April 12, 1932, 22-year-old Elwyn Rodgers, Inez's younger brother mysteriously disappeared from the farm of his adopted parents. Police were called in, a search party formed, woods and

streams scoured and LeRoy Lake was dragged. Some authorities believed the disappearance was linked to his sister's unsolved murder. When his foster-son's body was not found, Lon Rodgers suggested the police talk to Herman Oltman, the suspect in Elwyn's sister's murder. Police talked to Oltman, who had since moved to Rochester, but Oltman said he had no information concerning the young man's disappearance.

Genesee County Sheriff, Herbert Snyder, thought the boy had merely run off. Elwyn and Inez's older sister, living in Cleveland, thought the same. She sent a letter to the Sheriff saying her brother "talked of going to California" because he was unsatisfied in his life so far. Sure enough, almost six months later in September 1932, Elwyn showed up at the Rodgers' farm. He had been in the Southwestern U.S., traveling and working odd jobs. His foster-father vaguely told reporters his son's restlessness and wanderlust was due to some illness.

Joseph "Goat" Miller was paroled from Attica Prison late in 1932. Goat tried to live with family, at his brother's farm in Henrietta, and with his mother in the little house on South Goodman. But, Miller was difficult to live with, restless and paranoid, again accusing his family of poisoning his food. Goat Miller was an exceptionally good golfer, winning some small tournaments in his youth, and was well known and liked at the Genesee Golf Club. He got a job there, caddying, opening the pro shop in the morning, repairing equipment, cleaning the locker rooms. He slept on a cot in the caddy shack. Despite his nervous erratic nature, catatonic trances, and a continuing paranoia concerning the food from the golf club's restaurant being "doped", he was described as



A 1926 Chrysler, similar to the car in which Inez Smead is thought to have been killed

a good responsible worker, and fine golfer and caddy. He soon became friendly with men he caddied for, including Captain Anthony Andrews of the Rochester Detectives Division.

So it was unusual, but not particularly suspicious, when on August 23, 1935 Goat walked into the police station and asked to speak to Detective Captain Andrews. But what happened next surprised everyone: Goat confessed to the murder of Inez Smead. He claimed for seven years he had been “suffering from remorse” and his conscience finally got the better of him. Miller claimed the shooting took place at the end of a ten-day drunken spree, in which he stole the blue coupe, bought some 25 cent booze on Spring Street and drove out of the city with his rifle with the intention to hunt pheasants. He then picked up the young woman on Highland Ave, drove around and parked. There was some kissing. Goat hoped there would be more than that. Although his recollection was not clear, Goat supposed he pulled the rifle from behind the seat intending to shoot at a bird he saw. He claimed as he grabbed it, the gun went off accidentally striking Inez in the stomach. The girl panicked and leapt out of the coupe and ran. Knowing there would be consequences, Goat put the rifle to his shoulder, aimed, and shot at her, striking her in the head. Inez fell, and Goat drove off.

Following his confession, he was committed to Rochester State Hospital for observation. He was there when indicted by a grand jury for murder on September 24th, 1935. The hospital doctors reported they did not think Miller was insane. On December 9th, 1935, Miller was tried for murder in the second degree and though he confessed, he pleaded not guilty. His lawyer claimed Inez’s death was

accidental, excusable homicide, as the first and fatal shot was due to accidental discharge of the rifle as he pulled it from behind the car seat. Although he admitted firing again at her after she left the vehicle, the bullet to her head did not result in her death. It was the unintentional accidental wound in the abdomen that caused her demise.

The jury did not agree with this scenario, and two days later they found Miller guilty of the murder of Inez Smead. Monroe County Judge William Kohlmetz sentenced Miller to 20 years to life and he was sent to Attica State Prison on December 23rd, 1936. However, the following March, Miller was released in order to appeal to the Supreme Court. He was granted a second trial, but once again found guilty of second-degree murder. Denied a second appeal, he was returned to Auburn on May 8, 1936.

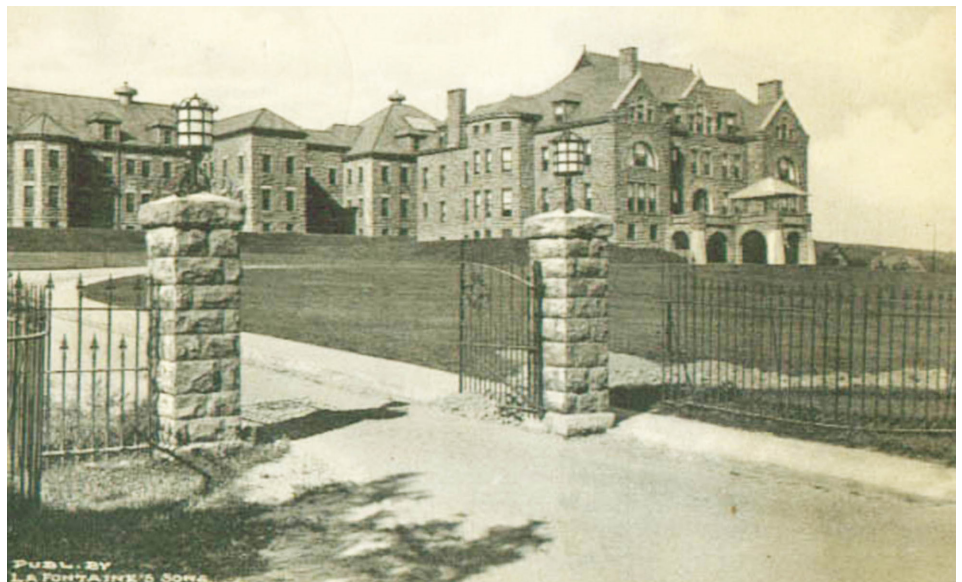
Beginning in 1938, Miller’s odd behaviors brought him to the attention of the Auburn prison staff. He had stopped working, stopped eating, started spending more and more of his time self-isolating in his cell, and complained often of a “cracking in his head.” In March 1939, Miller was transferred to the Dannemora State

Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He would spend the next 33 years at Dannemora, finally paroled in 1972 when the hospital closed. Miller returned to Rochester. When he died in February of 1976 at the age of 82, he was living on Arnold Park. However, his death certificate was filed in the Town of Canandaigua; likely the former World War I vet spent his final days at the Veterans Hospital there. He is buried with his family in Mt. Hope Cemetery.

Council Rock Estates remains a suburban paradise of stately homes and manicured lawns. Few of today’s residents would suspect the tragic events that happened there on cold November day almost a century before.

—HB—

This article is primarily based on archival newspaper articles from the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, Times-Union, Daily Record, Batavia News, Perry Herald and records of the Supreme Court of N.Y. 4th Appellate Division, and N.Y. State Dept. of Correction files (Thanks to Andrew Arpy at NYS Archives). Photos courtesy those newspapers, and the Monroe County Library System’s Rochester Images database including the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection.



Dannemora State Hospital where Joseph Miller lived for more than 30 years after his conviction

MAURICE J. JOYCE, JR.

By Matthew Bashore

Inez Smead, the murder victim, was employed as a domestic at the home of Maurice J. Joyce, Jr. Joyce was the son of a successful New York City real estate executive and his Rochesterian wife Mary (nee Derrick). Though born in Brooklyn in 1892 and raised in Westchester County, Joyce Jr., like his father, also chose a Rochesterian as a bride. Maurice and Ruth Menter were married in 1923, a few years after Joyce returned from duty in France as a first lieutenant in the Army Air Corps in the first World War. They settled in the Park Avenue neighborhood of Rochester, where Joyce's mother had moved upon the death of her husband.

During the 1920's, Joyce, with offices in Rochester's Powers Building, was frequently mentioned in the Real Estate sections of the Rochester newspapers, buying apartment buildings and commercial blocks throughout the city. In the summer of 1924 he paid \$100,000 for 20 lots from the developers of the new

Council Rock Estates. Like many real estate salesmen, he often built houses on speculation on the lots he owned, and the Joyce family lived in several of these in the neighborhood on Council Rock, Pelham Rd. and Highland Ave. until they found buyers. The newspapers soon began referring to Joyce, as a builder as well as a broker. Many of the very expensive homes he built were designed by the prolific Rochester architect, C. Storrs Barrows. Joyce seems to have profited during this time, as he and his wife treated themselves to a cruise around the world in 1925. They also took several extended trips to Europe, and the couple spent most winters in Bermuda. Mrs. Joyce appeared often on the Society page, mostly in association with the Thursday Aid Society, an elite philanthropic ladies club.

In early 1932 Joyce took over the Star Laundry Company, the family business of the late husband of his sister,

Mrs. Roscoe Hagen. The enterprise went bankrupt in September of that year, likely a victim of the worsening Depression. During the 1930's, though the building boom was over, Joyce continued as a broker and added insurance salesman to his title. In 1936 the couple, and their two boys moved to a large farm on Pittsford-Mendon Rd and ran the Summit Hill Day Camp in summer for the children of Rochester's elite professional class.

After the death of his mother, Joyce and his wife moved to Los Angeles, California where he was general manager of another large laundry service. When the U.S. entered World War II, Joyce, age 50, reenlisted in the Air Force, serving as a production executive for Air Technical Services Command and as liaison at Lockheed Aircraft. Colonel Maurice Joyce died shortly after the war in 1947, and is buried in Riverside Cemetery in Rochester.

HB



An Invitation to View
A Most Extraordinary Colonial Cottage
Open for Inspection Today

on Council Rock Avenue
Motor approach, via Pelham Road

On opening this beautiful Colonial Cottage for inspection today, General Realty Service is even more anxious to give the public a close-up of a house of rare Colonial architecture than it is to sell the house itself. This cottage will appeal to all who see it and, we predict, it will be purchased by one of the first to inspect it. It literally abounds in touches of good taste such as one sees in the country places on Long Island and The Sound. It was built by Maurice J. Joyce, on plans by C. Storrs Barrows. The lot, 70x160 feet, is graded, shrubbed and fruited. True Colonial interior decorations are used effectively in the rooms on the first floor. On the second floor there are three bedrooms and two baths done in colored tile and a maid's room and bath. The house is ideally arranged, perfectly designed, splendidly constructed and moderately priced. Include it in your Sunday drive—you'll feel amply repaid.



Coal supply for the winter is now in the basement. Connected gas and electric service assures immediate possession.

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- and a very low price!

Two Splendid Specimens of Joyce-Built Homes

Good architecture and superior construction are the outstanding features of these two new homes in the Council Rock development. One is an English cottage, the other a New England Colonial house, each designed by C. Storrs Barrows. They have every final and finished detail which one would expect to find in a home of the better sort and several which will prove delightful surprises. These homes will make an immediate appeal to those who are interested in acquiring a truly distinctive residence.

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These properties have been more than fulfilled, and we take pleasure in announcing that the first of the

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This Dutch Colonial house, erected by Maurice J. Joyce, is attractively arranged and masterfully constructed. Visitors will be delighted with its living room and open fireplace; its ultra-modern kitchen; its master's bedroom with built-in robe and shower; and the attached garage, built as directly as the house.

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In short, it's a home such as you might own with pride and show with pride!

For appointment to see this Dutch Colonial, call the owner, Maurice J. Joyce, 425 Powers Building, or General Realty Service, or your own broker.

Council Rock Estates has been proclaimed "A super-development destined to become the most highly priced and most sought-after section of Rochester."

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The desire to reside in the city's most community is natural. To decide upon Council Rock Estates is logical!

MERCHANTS OF MONROE: THE 'OTHER' TWELVE CORNERS PLAZA

By Raymond Tierney III

Twelve Corners first debuted as the commercial center of the Town of Brighton in the early 1940's with the construction of Twelve Corners Plaza and the addition of Howard Johnson's. Something else happened at that time as another plaza on Monroe Ave. was constructed adjacent to Howard Johnson's. It is often said that the beginning of the commercial boom at Twelve Corners happened when the Twelve Corners Plaza anchored by Wegmans and Neisner's was opened in the early forties.

According to an article in the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle on June 27, 1940, the Brighton Town Board reviewed several dramatic rezoning proposals. On that one night, Twelve Corners was forever changed from farm land, old structures and open space to the beginnings of what remains today as the commercial hub of the town. In addition to the Twelve Corners Plaza on the north side of Monroe Avenue, a plaza adjacent to Howard Johnson's Restaurant on the south side of Monroe Avenue was publicly reviewed. That strip plaza is the subject of this Merchants of Monroe article.

According to the proposal presented to the Brighton Town Board and subject to a Zoning Board review, the "other"

plaza (it was not given a specific name) was to be anchored by a 9,000 square foot A&P supermarket on the west end of the development. The plan was introduced by the Sheehan family and Ethel Ronan. It is interesting to note that the plan called for the razing of the historic Sheehan homestead. Also included in the application were plans for up to 8,000 square feet of additional stores including a eastern anchor that was to be a Star Market. Amazingly, within two years the Twelve Corners would have three supermarkets and two major shopping plazas.

By 1949, the A&P was expanded and completely remodeled as evidenced by the Grand Opening advertisement in the July 31st D&C. In addition to ample parking, the store was easily accessed from the Brighton-Pittsford bus route. It is also noteworthy that the fluorescent lighting pioneered by Wegmans across the street was promoted along with 12 checkouts and an expansive presentation of "self service" meats. Of course, one of the highlights of the expansion was the enlarged coffee department featuring A&P's signature Eight O'Clock self grind coffee. A&P together with the now flourishing Star Market surely made the plaza a shopper's delight.

By the 1960's, many things were changing. A new anchor tenant, a new owner and an expansion would define the decade. The plaza was purchased by a group led by Robert Miller. This "Merchant of Monroe" and his group oversaw the complete remake of the plaza. In 1961 Star Market decided to move to the newly developed Pittsford Plaza just up Monroe Ave. Replacing the store in 1962 was an independently owned Super Duper. Fox's Kosher Deli was positioned between the two supermarkets as the A&P had decided to stay despite opening a store in Pittsford Plaza. The other major change happened in the rear of the property when the US Post Office opened its 14618 station. Miller and his group had reimagined the plaza and ushered in the best of times for both merchants and customers.

As I have documented in a previous article, (Vol. 20 No. 3) this period saw the first opening of a supermarket on Sundays when Super Duper added this necessity for some and convenience for all. During this period it was not unusual to find lines waiting to enter Fox's on weekends. According to Shelly Fox in an article written by Allan Morrell in the D&C, "we had lines out the door from 8 in the morning until 1 in the afternoon on weekends." The plaza was one busy

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place on Sundays with the crowd at Fox's and the promotion of free cream cheese with a bag of bagels at Super Duper. My sisters, Debbie, Patty, Liz and Rose assisted in that weekly task. We witnessed all this first hand as our dad, Raymond Tierney Jr., owned and operated the Eagle Super Duper.

A little more about Robert Miller needs to be told. He could be found around the plaza often. I vividly remember him coming into Super Duper checking on things and being eager to make sure that the Miller Pop section was properly stocked. His family opened that operation in 1902 and he was an enthusiastic promoter of its products. On a personal note, he was instrumental in my father's transition from a operating a small market on Clinton Avenue to competing successfully with chain stores such as Wegmans and A&P.

By the 1970's you would have found the following businesses: Eagle Super Duper, CVS, Fox's Deli, Hoss's German Sausage Shoppe, Peter and Samuel's Hair Salon, Bingo's Sub Shop, Cerame's Italian Restaurant and the post office. This diverse mix of retail and service made the plaza a one stop destination for many Brightonians. All that would change on February 1, 1974 with a fire that destroyed all of the plaza except for the drugstore. It seems that the A&P had required a fire wall that ultimately saved CVS. Michael Miller, Robert's son, who had been recently elected to the Brighton Town Board, recalled a quote attributed to him after the fire. He said, "I had been elected on a promise to preserve open space, now it appears that I'm creating it also." That event is a worthy subject for a future article!

Brighton Commons, built by the Home Leasing Corporation, included a new Super Duper, a refurbished CVS and a mini-mall between the two. Included

in the mall was the Elegant Gent Hair Salon owned by Tony Gaiter. Today, it is the only original tenant still operating in Brighton Commons. A picture hanging on Tony's wall shows an advertisement from October 1975 that includes all the original tenants and confirms his "last man standing" status.

The plaza is now owned by Harris "Bud" Rusitzky and Jim Biden's sons

Mathew and Douglas. It is undergoing yet another reincarnation. Interestingly, the old delivery bay for the Super Duper that closed in 1993, today houses an Abbot's Custard. The recent addition of CoreLife Eatery fronting Elmwood Avenue and ongoing construction to the main building holds much promise for this important piece of Brighton's business heritage.

—HB—

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of this issue of the Historic Brighton Journal*

SPOTLIGHT ON JIM CHRISTY: BRIGHTON HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1957

By Arlene Vanderlinde

Jim Christy is a man of many interests and talents. It seems that he pursued them all; music, painting landscapes and portraits, buying and selling antiques, restoring historic woodwork and being a husband, father and grandfather.

During his years at Brighton High School, he was a drummer in a Brighton-based rock 'n roll band with his classmates, Steve, Jim and Rob Alaimo and Brad Shapiro. Known as the Red Coats, they achieved local fame during their high school and college years (see Spring-2016 Historic Brighton Newsletter) and national fame during the 1960s when they caught the eye of Dick Clark. Yes, THAT Dick Clark! They worked with him to make records and tour the country for a few years.

When that ended, Jim got down to business as a corporate account executive for insurance companies and then became an antique dealer

with his first wife, who died in 2011. His attention to detail led him to a business specializing in the removal of layers of paint from beautiful woodwork found in Rochester homes built in the late nineteenth century and early 20th century. In the mid-20th century, hardwood interior details were routinely “modernized” by painting them. Jim’s business, “The Finishing Touch” was dedicated to returning the wood trim to its original beauty.

Susan and Jim Locke, now former owners of a 1928 Tudor Revival at 90 Brookwood Road in Brighton, hired Jim’s company to complete the extensive refinishing process begun by Susan, whose work effort resulted in severe tendonitis in her elbow. The woodwork on first floor of their Tudor Revival home had been painted several times, hiding the beauty of the mahogany. Following Jim’s meticulous restoration and other sensitively done projects, this

home and its owners were honored with the Landmark Society’s Tender Loving Care Stewardship Award. This is one example of the fine work of Jim Christy and was truly “The Finishing Touch.” There are dozens more examples of Jim’s work in the community that represent a great effort to preserve the quality of our fine residential architectural heritage.

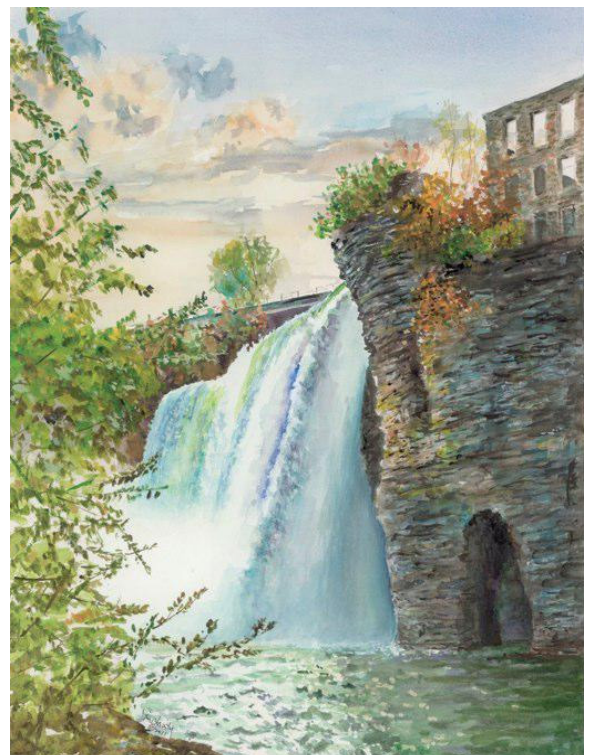
Bill Beeney wrote about Jim’s many talents in his Democrat & Chronicle column from 1978. Thanks to Michael Kilian, Executive Editor of the D&C, we have permission to include that article in this issue (see next page).

Jim remarried and has since “retired” to Florida where painting is still an important part of his life. The Finishing Touch is still doing fine refinishing work in our community under the ownership of Jim’s former partner, John Cary.

—————HB—————



Left: Historic Brighton member, Susan Locke, removed the six layers of paint from the woodwork in her living room at 90 Brookwood Road. The fine sanding and finishing was completed by Jim Christy (Photo used with permission)



Right: “High Falls” landscape painting by Jim Christy (used with permission from the artist)



Last summer he made big decision: start a different career at age 39

Jim Christy looks like what he used to be.

He is 6 feet 3, handsome, has a commendable thick moustache, a captivating personality, an undeniable zest for life at 39, and an easy ability to communicate articulately.

That's a fairly reasonable description of any successful young junior executive, a salesman type.

Christy was that, for about 13 years. But it wasn't what he really wanted. So last summer he made a move: "I decided to go out and do what I really wanted to do."

What he really wanted was to have time to pursue his true loves in terms of time: He wanted to go into the furniture refinishing business, to go back to playing his drums, to keep his brushes and palette busy painting watercolors.

And that's what he is doing now.

"IT WASN'T AN EASY DECISION," he admitted the other day as we chatted in his home on Commodore Parkway. "I guess a lot of people talk about taking such a step, but most of them don't do it, and that's understandable.

"I had financial obligations like everyone else — the mortgage payments, the automobile expenses, putting food on the table. You know, all the things we face every day. But I said: 'Hey, if you don't do it now, at 39, you are going to pass the point of no return. Either take the step or forget about it.' I decided to take the step."

Since he had been interested in furniture refinishing for many years and had done a considerable amount of it as a hobby, that seemed the most logical way to make a day — to — day living, even though it seems a far cry from selling insurance. He spent the first couple of months after leaving the predictable world of commerce setting up a small shop in his garage, and immediately lost 15 unnecessary pounds.

The refinishing business has been moving along at a nice steady pace, and in fact he has spun off into an unexpected area.

"I had one job where the people asked me to do some refinishing right in their home, doing over the fireplace mantel, the stairway bannisters, that sort of thing. So far as I know there aren't any — or at least not many — refinishers who go out and do that kind of work in the home.

"Today, with so many older homes being restored by young couples, for example in the Park Ave.-East Ave. area, there seems to be a call for that sort of service."

Bill Beene

Matter of fact, Christy received another such commission a few days ago and feels he may concentrate on that phase of the refinishing art. He named his new business "The Finishing Touch." It includes the buying and selling of antique furniture. His wife, Debbie, is part and parcel of the operation.

CHRISTY WAS BORN IN ROCHESTER, was graduated from Brighton High School, attended the University of Kansas and the University of Rochester. Then, between college and a stint in the Navy (with the amphibious fleet) he went on the road with a rock and roll combo, he being the drummer.

The highlight of the group's existence was when it appeared on the Dick Clark show in Miami where the group, known as the "Redcoats," cut some records. One of them, "I Want You to Love Me," was the No.1 hit in Miami for a while.

"Dick Clark played that record on his show every day for three weeks," Christy said, "but do you know something, we didn't make a dime out of it. I guess the timing just wasn't right."

In the group were Steve Alaimo of Rochester, who headed it and played lead guitar; Jim Alaimo, Steve's cousin, now an attorney in Rochester. He played rhythm guitar. And Brad Shapiro, also of Brighton, who played bass.

"Our business manager was Bob Green. He's the fellow who is married to Anita Bryant, and he is her manager. He was a prominent disc jockey in Miami at the time we were there."

Both Shapiro and Steve Alaimo are in the record producing business in Florida now. Alaimo also is a horse trainer.

IN 1965 Christy went to work as a salesman for Liberty Mutual Insurance Co. and later went with what was then the Boller-Clark agency and is now Marsh and McLennan. He was an account executive in the area of mass marketing, supplying insurance for large employers.

His first customers when he turned to refinishing furniture instead of writing policies were the people who knew him in insurance and also know of his abilities with furniture. He's a painstaking craftsman.

"I guess the thing that appeals to anyone who cuts loose on his own this way is that he realizes he can work as much as he wants to, or has to, without a special time frame.

"Actually, it turns out that you work much longer and probably harder than you did before, but there is a certain satisfaction in this that is lacking elsewhere. Yes, it does require a lot of self discipline."

Jim is also back in the drumming business, with Al Johnson's group, Al being a veteran trumpet player around town. And he is almost finding time to keep working on his watercolors and pen-and-ink drawings. To be truthful, he hasn't found as much time for that as he'd like, but in a small studio he has created in one room of his house, he is as artistically active as his other interests allow.

A FEW YEARS AGO Christy was in a group that was cutting a record in a recording studio on St. Paul Street, upstairs in the building over the Harry Forman Clothing Co. store.

They cut their record at night. Jim was only required to do his drumming bit, then he could leave while they did some over-dubbing or whatever else they call it.

He went to the session dressed informally, to say the least. He wore a pair of Bermuda shorts, a T-shirt, and sneakers. He had to take his drums up to the studio on a freight elevator at the back of the building, and he had to come down the same way.

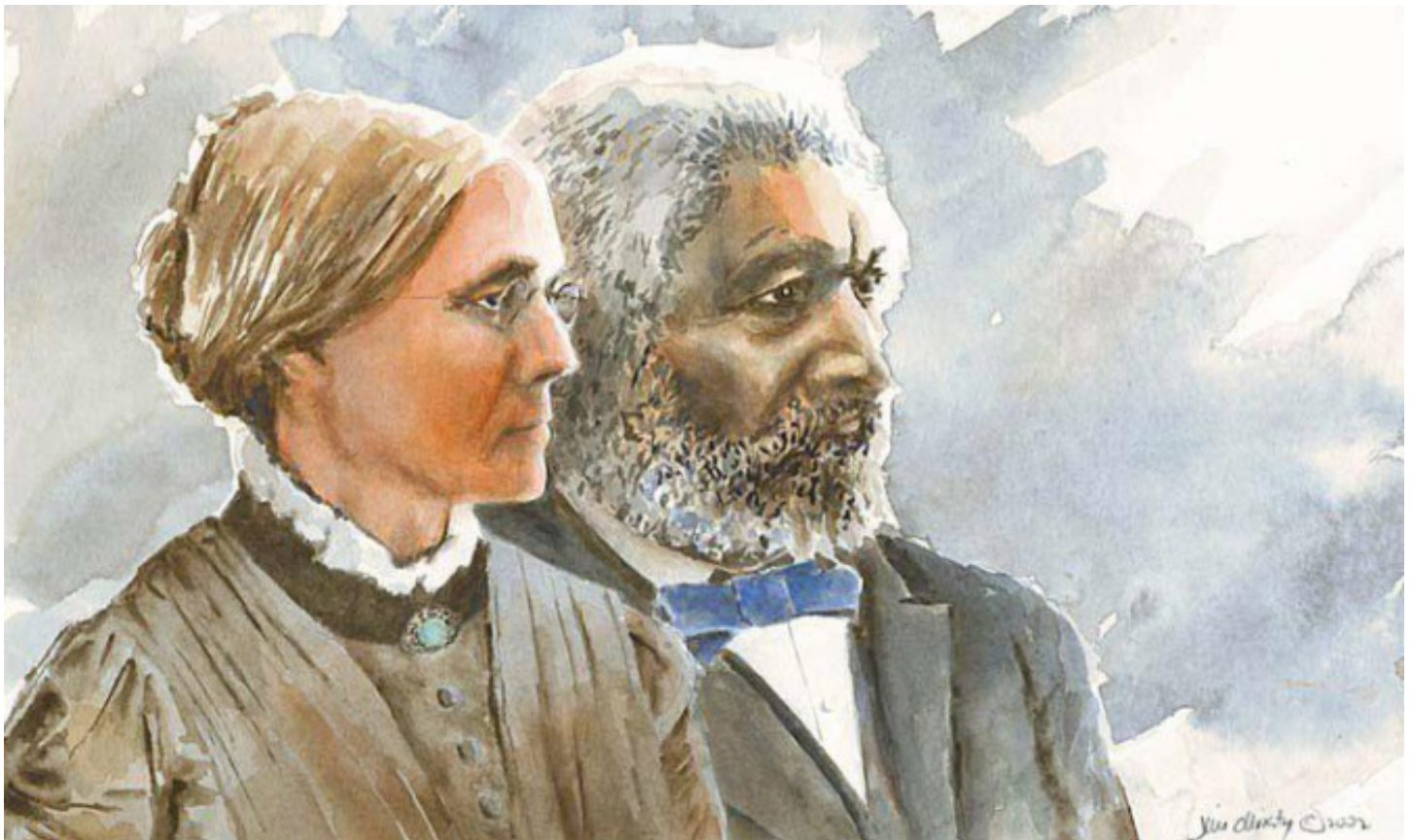
It was about midnight when he prepared to leave. But after he got all his paraphernalia on the elevator, it refused to descend properly. It got stuck somewhere along the route, and Christy struggled with the elevator door. He finally forced it open, but only partially. Not enough to get out, but enough for him to peek out and realize he was almost inside the Forman store. Finally the elevator was back in action; it moved down to the ground level.

As he stepped off the elevator he was faced with a lineup of half a dozen policemen whose drawn guns were pointing at him. When he had monkeyed with the stuck elevator door, he had triggered the burglar alarm system of the store.

"There must have been eight or 10 police cars outside the place," Christy recalls, "and I was dressed in such a manner that they were sure they had nabbed a midnight burglar. Fortunately I not only had all my drumming equipment with me, but the rest of the guys were still upstairs in the recording studio and they vouched for me, that any breaks I had taken were with my drums and not with the clothing store door."

JIM CHRISTY: SELECTED WORKS

Used with permission from the artist; see more at <http://www.jimchristy.com/>



"Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass"



"Eastman Theatre, Rochester, NY"



"Charlotte Beach Lighthouse #1"