HISTORIC BRIGHTON

Newsletter and Journal

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

Volume 27 No. 02 - Summer 2026

www.historicbrighton.org

A Century of Memories:

A Neighbor Recalls His Childhood in Corbett's Glen

Aerial photograph of Penfield Road and Corbett's Glen from July of 1928, photo provided by a Corbett's Glen neighbor
Note: the Corbett farm is at the top right, and the iconic tunnel is just out of frame to the right of the farm.

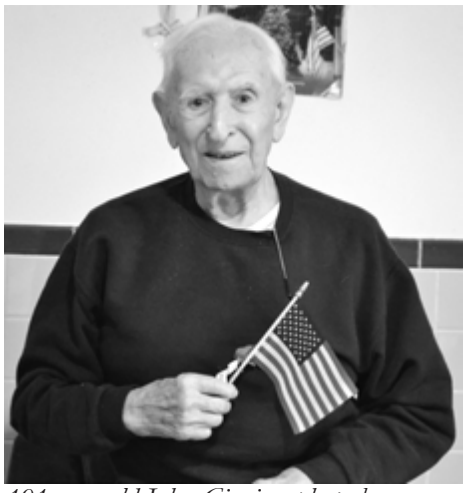
Living History: A Centenarian Recalls His Youth in Corbett's Glen

Interview by Jeff Vincent, Historic Brighton Trustee, with assistance from Deb Bower

Note from the Editor:

On the afternoon of the 2 June 2026, I stepped into John Ciarico's kitchen to find him sitting at the table dressed all in navy blue and ready for action. He stood abruptly and confidently, and shook my hand with the customary strength of a World War II veteran. My intent that day was to snap a few photos and be on my way, but I was instead drawn into a photographic review of John's adolescence in Corbett's Glen and young adulthood in the Air Force - a role he assumed after being inspired by his upbringing in what is now Corbett's Glen. It is hard to imagine all of the changes he has experienced and seen in the world at 101 years old; it is a rare thing to be able to pass on such experiences and recollections firsthand. This is but a small excerpt of the remarkable journey of a man from humble beginnings to soaring heights over global conflict. Special thank you to John, and to his daughters Gianna and Nina, for accommodating Jeff and myself in your home, and for the interview and photos. What follows are selections from a three-hour interview by Jeff Vincent on October 1st 2025 with John Ciarico (and with John's daughters in attendance). Jeff and Deb have lived in the Corbett Residence since 1984 - there is nobody more fitting to have conducted this interview! Jeff and Deb also serve as stewards of an immense collection of historic photos (including those featured in this article) entrusted to him by the Corbett family and neighboring Glen residents.

-Michael Lempert | Editor, HB Newsletter and Journal



101 year old John Ciarico, photo by Michael Lempert

This interview was arranged to document the memories and recollections from John Ciarico (101 years old as of this printing) who grew up in the Corbett's Glen neighborhood. Direct quotes from John are interspersed with background information collected during and after the interview.

Patrick Corbett (center, holding child) surrounded by his children and grandchildren, also note Charley, Mary ("Carrie") and J. Sarsfield Corbett; photo from the Corbett Family

John Ciarico worked in Corbett's Glen as a boy, from age 8 – 17, (1932-1941), for Patrick Corbett's son, "Charley." Patrick was retired and then passed away in 1936. Charles passed away in 1947. There was, understandably, lots of repetition of recollections over the three hours. Yet those repeated stories are what had the most importance regarding things John did in his life. One point John made numerous times is that those nine years helping the Corbetts were the happiest years of his life. John recalled that "They were nice people, and good looking!"

John remembers the "celery shed." He spent a lot of time in there. Up on the hill (Dale Road area), the Corbetts raised carrots and beans.

Patrick Corbett and grandsons looking West; photo from the Corbett Family

"That dirt road up to Penfield Road I know very well. I did a lot of walking up there. I liked to watch the trains. There was a well beyond the celery shed where they washed the carrots, potatoes, lettuce and celery. Grandma [referring to his mother] used to go down there and weed, too. She taught me how. They said if you have to go [to the bathroom], go where the horses are, but I was afraid of the horses. They were huge! I was a little guy. The horses were good. They would bend down and nuzzle me. I thought they were trying to eat me! I'd be screaming and the horses couldn't figure out what was going on."

Portrait of John Ciarico as a young man, photo provided by the Ciarico family

"Charley had a guy who 'worked' the horses. I remember when he let me lead the first horse. Believe me, I was scared!!! I thought I'd 'crap my pants,' but the horse did everything I told him to do."

"I would walk from my house at 935 West Linden Avenue [the house remains standing as of this writing, located near to the Sebastian's Car Recycling] to the Corbett farm. I'd get there by 8:00AM. When I was 12, my father got me a bike with blocks placed on the pedals so I could reach them. I used to go to the market [the Public Market we use today] with Mary ("Carrie") Corbett, Charley's wife. She always wore an apron. We used to sell stuff like crazy. I had two stalls and she had two stalls also. I made money like crazy. I always got tipped. They would see this little [Italian] boy there. I never kept the tips. I made sure the Corbetts got the tips. I got 10 cents an hour. At the bottom of the barn was the place where they got the plants started. In back was stored market produce."

"They never let anybody into the Corbett house. I used to get on top of the sand hill [still in existence at the back of the glen]. The best place I ever worked."

I [Jeff] asked if John remembered the airplane owned by Charles Corbett's

Sarsfield checking the engine of his plane while docked in Irondequoit Bay; photo provided by a Corbett's Glen neighbor

Sarsfield with his plane while docked in Irondequoit Bay; photo provided by a Corbett's Glen neighbor

J. Sarsfield Corbett on the front step of the Corbett farmhouse, photo from the Corbett family

son, Sarsfield. The airplane was kept at the airport that used to be where the White Haven Cemetery is located now. Sarsfield would store his plane in a shed in the glen during the off season. His welding shop was in the garage of the Corbett residence. John did remember Sar's plane.

John said, "The plane was orange. He wanted to take me up and I said, 'Are you crazy?' So what did I do? I joined the Air Force. I couldn't figure that one out!"

"Sometimes Mr. Corbett (Charley) would take me, my sister Maime, Dorothy B. and Alice T. to Mendon Ponds where the Corbetts rented land. We would weed acres and acres of carrots. After he would take us to one of the lakes (ponds) to clean up while Charley was at the beer joint. When Charley came back he was 'cranked.' We were afraid to 'razz' him when he had had a couple. At the Corbett farm and at Mendon, one person would dig the hole and one would put the plant in and the other would cover it up."

I [Jeff] found this interesting because over the years I had been told that Patrick Corbett rented land to farm in Mendon back in the 1880's while also renting land in the glen to farm as well, prior to Patrick's purchasing what is now known as Corbett's Glen. It seems likely this land that John is referring to is the same land that Patrick was renting in the 1880's. I had not known that the Mendon rental continued after Patrick purchased the glen in 1892.

"I started cutting Kate Gleason's grass when I was 12 years old and also on Parson's Lane off of East Avenue for five houses. The guy took me up into the garage and showed me all of these maps. A whole layout of maps of all of the railroads in Monroe County. Mr. Kingston used to treat me good. I remember when cutting grass off of East Avenue I passed out because it was so hot. My father was working as a gardener for a Mr. Wilmot Castle that day and my dad had to come get me. He threw water on me. It was the first time I rode in one of Mr. Castle's classy cars."

I [Jeff] called Hank Kingston to find out more information about the railroad map collection John referred to. The man John mentioned, Mr. Kingston, was Hank's grandfather, Henry Houston Kingston, who was a good friend of Kate Gleason. John was impressed when I showed him a picture that Mr. Kingston had taken at one of Kate Gleason's parties at

Aerial photograph by Doug Biers of the Corbett's Glen tunnel facing East (farm at top), c. 1930, photo provided by Ellen (Biers) Adams

her mansion, 'Clones,' where John cut the grass. Hank said his ancestors had all worked for the railroads since the beginning of the industry. Henry retired from 31 years at the Rochester, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh Railroad in 1933. Henry was a founder of (and also retired in 1947 from 20 years with) the Brighton Fire Department.

Back in John's East Rochester neighborhood, "Two girls one time got into one of the new Despatch Railroad cars. The train 'picked' the car up and they were downtown before the girls were found."

"A friend took me up on a plane ride, age 11 or 12, at the Marsh Road Airport. I liked it! This is why I joined the Air-Force at 17 years old as a ball turret tail gunner on a B-17 Bomber. I did 20 missions. I swung the ball turret so fast it affected the flight of the plane so the pilot asked, 'what the hell are you doing back there?' I got shot down twice. I was so small I could easily open the turret door and fall out. It was always a hard parachute landing. I would bury the chute so they couldn't find me. We were behind the lines in Italy. When I spoke Italian they knew I was one of them. As a translator they treated me great. The crew knew we were going to get out of there because I knew Italian. There was a place six feet under the hay pile in the barn. That is where we lay down. So when the Germans put hay forks into the pile they didn't find us because we were underneath. The 'underground' used to help us. I would dress up like a woman to go into town. My wife would get mad because I was kicking the covers with a bad dream. Bam!!! While I was over there [in Germany], there were German POWs living behind my house in East Rochester, there to work painting the new railroad cars. When I would get lonely in the service I would think about my time helping the Corbetts and I would tell the other guys. Some of them were from midwestern farms and they would love it. I was sent to Africa, Italy, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Ukraine."

"When I got back from the war, I worked at the Lawless Paper Mill. The town dumped sewage into the creek at night and when I worked at the paper mill on Irondequoit Creek, the smell was terrible. A guy at the paper mill got his sleeve caught in the roller. I and others tried to pull him out but he died. Two friends, brothers, worked twelve hour shifts on night and day. The boss did nothing to improve things. I quit. I worked as a blacksmith in the car shops. I worked delivery in the post office and worked delivery of food, etc. at the trailer parks."

"My father [Peter] did lawns, railroad track work, and then car shop work and the WPA digging ditches and sewer lines. My mother [Antoinette] was an excellent seamstress for Bond Clothing. My father was a gardener for Kate Gleason and Wilmot Castle. My mother was a seamstress for Amalgamated Clothing and would bring scraps home to make clothing."

HB

Portrait of John Ciarico in his military uniform, photo provided by the Ciarico family

A Note to our Members: Correction on Issue 27 No. 1

In the previous issue of this newsletter, at the end of the last article "History Today: Historic Photos at Brighton High School," we mistakenly referred to a longtime supporter of Historic Brighton as "the late David Grinnell." However, we are delighted to share that David Grinnell is very much alive and well. The digital version of this publication has been corrected on our website, but as the printed version is not so easily edited post-distribution, let this message set the record straight and, once more, apologize to David and his family for the confusion. Thank you for your many years of support - we hope this message finds you well!

-Michael Lempert

Editor, HB Newsletter and Journal

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Looking Back: Rochester's Subway - A Failure?

By *Barbara Kaplan, Former Brighton Resident*

"*Oh subway, I still grieve for you even though you've been dead a year*," wrote Richard E. Welch of 594 Wellington Avenue in a letter to the editor of the Democrat and Chronicle on 3 July 1957. He was among the many Rochesterians who sadly missed the subway, which was, at the time, a bold venture in rapid transit for a city of its size.

In his letter he said, "*When you (the subway) were born December 1, 1927, what a clean and ambitious looking subway you were! The gleam and sparkle from your cars served notice you were really going to make something of yourself. However, in the years that passed, you chose to associate yourself with the wrong group of people. They promised you great things; they promised you a great future.*"

The letter continued:

"*Yes, dear subway, your promisers didn't want you. They had bigger ideas, namely expressway ideas. What a sad world it must have been for you throughout the years, finding yourself no place, yet carrying the vision of someday having your talents utilized. The sight of the War Memorial perked you up, for you realized what an asset you could be to it. No one understood your attitude, and then you grieved more and more because no one would fight for your cause.*

I appreciated your work, subway. Many a cold morning you took me to my place of employment at Delco and Rochester Products.

On the last few years since the death sentence was imposed on you, we all wanted to help you, yet we were only individuals. We could not fight City Hall. To you, who died of a broken heart, we hope your trip to paradise was a glorious one."

Newspaper clippings which fill four scrapbooks tell the story of the Rochester subway system, and, as I poured over them in the Rundel Library, a flood of memories of my childhood and boarding the subway for "downtown" returned.

On 29 March 1964, the Democrat & Chronicle published an article by Arch Merrill that traced the origins of the subway. It was titled "*Now It's Loops and Lanes Where Subway Used to Run.*" Merrill wrote, "*Building a rapid transit electric railway in the bed of the old Erie Canal through Rochester was planned by the city fathers as early as 1911, although the new Barge Canal, which swung south of the city, was not put into operation until 1918. Ground was broken for the subway on May 2, 1922.*

The line, which eventually cost $12 million to build, extended from the former Western Wide Waters near the present Rochester Products plant to Rowlands station in Brighton. The road was operated by the New York State Railways, which became the present Rochester Transit Corporation. It was subsidized by the city."

Merrill reported that the first car ran from Winton Road to City Hall on a Saturday, 1 December 1923, and operations began over the entire route on Friday just a few weeks later, on 8 February 1924.

Merrill wrote, "*A prime reason for building the subway was getting the big, clumsy interurban trolleys off the streets and underground. Within three years after completion of the subway, the interurbans were a thing of the past, victims of the age of gasoline.*"

It was said that when snowstorms paralyzed buses, the subway was a

Subway map, from Rochester and Genesee Valley Railroad Museum.

boon, and during the mid-1940s when wartime gasoline rationing existed, the subway prospered financially.

Among the reasons for the subway's failure are cited the following facts in several reports:

- It did not serve any large concentration of the population.
- The subway carried only about two percent of Rochester's transit passengers.
- Its downtown stations were too far from the retail center at Main and Clinton for most shoppers and office workers.

Someone once wisecracked that it was "*the only subway in the world that began nowhere and ended nowhere,*" and this saying was repeated by many over the years. By 1931, when the interurbans were dead, streetcars were used with some success for awhile. But then the rail service cars were dropped, the ramps were closed, and the subway cars were tied forever to their eight-mile route, unable to get closer than three blocks to the center of the city.

Former subway conductor James

(Jimmy) Erskine of Fairport enjoys reminiscing about his 43 1/2 years with the Rochester Transit Company. When he first started work, at age 17, Jimmy was conductor on the Rochester and Eastern Interurban, which went through the city and on to Geneva.

As he chatted about "the early days," Jimmy winked at his wife Myrtle and confided that Myrtle was a "regular" passenger on his car. His route was from Winton Road (Rowlands Station) to Driving Park. "*In 1931 I earned $28 a week as conductor and Myrtle spent it all!*" he laughingly remembers. One of his favorite stories (and he has several favorites) happened during the Great Depression.

"*I came up to the Winton Loop, and a man got on the subway and said to me, 'I haven't got any money to ride.'* "

I asked the man, "*Where you 'wanna go?*"

"*If I can just go downtown, I want to look for a job,*" was his reply. Jimmy let him on and he distinctly remembers a few months later the same man boarded his subway and said to him, "*Here's what I owe you for that subway ride. I got me that job.*"

After the passenger subways closed their doors, Jimmy went to work on the freight subways and then became a bus driver. He recalls seeing many of his subway passengers become his bus patrons. "*Many of 'em, I saw grow up,*" he remembers.

In 1927, on the first subway run, Jimmy says they borrowed an old interurban Sodus car. Both the interurbans and the subways ran on the subway tracks then. The first subway car could be operated from either end. The tracks were controlled by signals. Motormen received special training in learning the signal system. Jimmy recalled that the first subway cars came from Utica, N.Y., and the second ones to be used came from Little Falls, N.Y. and were a bit larger.

Does he favor a revival of some kind of rapid transit system today?

"*If you could say we're going to build a system with no political interference (like Toronto's) where laws and regulations are upheld, and if it would be owned and operated by one central authority, then I would like to see it revived. But—if you are going to service Charlotte, Gates, Greece, the city of Rochester and Henrietta, and you're talking about $60 million or more, how the heck are you going to please everyone? It's too complex financially and every other way.*"

Many fond memories of "subway days" are shared by George Cassidy, former Subway Division Superintendent of New York State Railways. Cassidy and his wife Anne, a former teacher at #43 school, live in the City of Rochester.

"*For anybody who lived near it, it was a godsend,*" said Cassidy, who speaks with honest enthusiasm. "*The subway was great for attorneys and Eastman Kodak workers on State Street.*"

Prior to becoming the Superintendent in 1942, Cassidy worked in the mechanical department and served as clerk to the General Superintendent of Transportation. After 33 years with the Rochester transit system, he retired.

Conductors sold shoppers' passes, weekly passes, and tokens, as well as taking care of cash fares and transfers. According to Cassidy, there were approximately 30 conductors, and it took anywhere from three days to a week to break in a motorman. They were required to pass a physical exam and a written block signal system exam.

Cassidy's keen memory of subway statistics is mixed with many scribbled tidbits of information which he has recorded in a little black book. "*Did you know there were 31.57 miles of track in the subway?*" he asked.

In 1944, some 600,000 people rode the subway. By 1953, his records show that 328,000 used it in a year's time. Other notes include that the time between cars during non-rush hours was about 17 minutes, and during rush hours there was a subway car every 3 to 4 minutes.

Colby Street stop of the Rochester subway, from Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum

The city had paid guards to patrol subway riding cars so people would feel safe. Cassidy said they were hired to "*...keep the school kids in line*". He remembers some kids used to put coins on the subway tracks to affect the signals. Another favorite prank was to put the waiting benches across the tracks.

With a speed of up to 44 miles per hour, Rochester's subway was known as the fastest in the world at that time, and this was written up in Ripley's Believe It or Not.

"*What gave you the impression of speed was the closeness of the subway cars to the wall,*" said Cassidy. "*On a hot day, that was a beautiful breeze with those windows wide open. Kids used to use the weekly passes and go joyriding on a Sunday. It was a pleasurable way to spend the afternoon.*"

In his column in the Democrat & Chronicle on 29 June 1956, Bill Beeney wrote, "*The youngsters were particularly impressed with the noise - the compressors on the cars and the thundering herd impression the car gave as it shot along the rails.*"

Cassidy said, "*They used to have a saying, if you lost anything ... look in the subway! We found just about anything and everything in the subway beds I recall. There were bicycles, deer, cases of liquor, and even a horse and milk wagon were found down there once. Oh, and lots of pheasants would fly into the windows as the subways zipped along, breaking the windows.*"

Like Jimmy Erskine, Cassidy has a wealth of stories to tell about people who rode the subway. One of his favorites was about a fellow, who, as a joke, boarded the subway and offered to buy a weekly pass from the operator with a $100 bill. This happened a few times, but one time the operator was on duty when the same fellow boarded with his $100 bill and asked for change. The operator laughingly gave him 99 singles as change!

Cassidy doesn't think the revival of Rochester's subway would go over big at this point in time. He noted that, "*Most people don't even want to ride the buses today. They seem to want to take their cars instead.*"

Cassidy is the proud possessor of a very cherished piece of subway memorabilia. It is a white, wallet-size card with red and black lettering that says "ROCHESTER SUBWAY FAREWELL TRIP: Leave 1:00 P.M. E.D.S.T. General Motors Carbarn; June 30, 1956." It marked the end of Rochester's subway passenger system.

And so the subway went out of existence. The roadbed was rough. The stations became dark and in need of repair. All surveys recommended the line should be junked. They said it was not worth extending or repairing for future use, for which there was little hope.

An article in the Cleveland Press (18 June 1956) titled, "*No Parallel for Cleveland in Subway Failure*" told the story of the Rochester subway system. It said in conclusion, "*Not many here [Rochester] will miss the subway when it's gone because not many have ridden it. It's likely to be known in history books as it's been known all these money losing years: 'The subway that began nowhere and ended nowhere.'*"

Many people will disagree. For a great many people it was as George Cassidy said, "*a Godsend.*" During the World War II years there was overcrowding on the subways, which proved its worth. In an article entitled "*The Rochester Subway, Experiment in Municipal Rapid Transit*" by Andrew Lipman, it was said, "*Passenger service increased from under 1.5 million passengers annually in the late thirties to over 3.5 million in 1943 and 1944; 4.8 million in 1945 and finally to a peak of 5.1 million in both 1946 and 1947.*"

Was Rochester's subway system a failure? On the contrary - in the opinion of many it seems to have been one of the all-time success stories in Rochester's transportation history. And, as an educated guess as to what it might have been in today's energy-conscious society, it still would be … "a Godsend".

HB

Rochester subway car, from Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museunm

Lost Treasures: Cynthia Howk and Richard Reisem

By *Amy Dodd Enis, Historic Brighton President*

Historic Brighton joins the greater Rochester Community in mourning the recent passing of two local legends in Historic Preservation: Cynthia Howk, and Richard Reisem.

Coincidentally, both were recent recipients of the Leo Dodd Historic Preservation Award for the years 2024 and 2023, respectively.

Upon receiving her Leo Dodd Award at the Buckland Lodge in October, 2024, Cynthia eagerly fielded questions from the Historic Brighton audience with her encyclopedic knowledge, quick wit, and unmatched energy. Cynthia shared stories about her professional path that began with an unexpected internship at the Landmark Society in 1976. A lifelong Rochesterian who received her Bachelor's in Music and a Master's in Music Education, Cynthia had always been interested in history. Her first task with the Landmark Society was a preservation project for Rochester's Third Ward. That project ignited a fire that spurred her to stay with the Landmark Society for nearly 50 years, most recently as Architectural Coordinator, until her official retirement in 2021.

Cynthia maintained her love of music throughout her life and she played the violin in the Brighton Symphony Community Orchestra for 50 years. Her enthusiasm and passion were inspiring to many, and her years of research, education, and advocacy of architectural preservation extended beyond the city limits and across New York State. She left an invaluable mark on Rochester, and her spark and light will surely continue to glow fondly in the minds of all who are fortunate to remember her.

Richard was tall in both stature and accomplishments, and he possessed a kind and gentle spirit. A native of Iowa, he graduated from Iowa State University where he majored in Architecture, English and Journalism. Richard moved to Rochester in 1955 in order to work for Kodak and he ended up spending 31 years there as a manager and producer of Presentations and Promotions, a role that included speechwriting for six of the company's CEOs. Upon receiving his Leo Dodd Award, Richard gave a heartfelt speech, with anecdotes about Leo and their shared experiences working for Kodak through the years. Richard also shared details of his lifelong interest in Historic Preservation.

In his retirement, Richard worked tirelessly as a freelance writer and authored sixteen books on various subjects including six on Mount Hope Cemetery. Through the years his strong interest in architecture and local history aided his service on the Rochester Preservation Board, and the Landmark Society Board. He is possibly best known for his association and profound dedication to the Mount Hope Cemetery, and in 1980 founded the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery. He named and was editor-in-chief of their monthly newspaper, "Epitaph" for many years. Like Cynthia, Richard was also a lover of classical music and a strong supporter of the arts. Richard will be greatly missed but his impact on Rochester will continue indefinitely.

HB

Portrait of Cynthia Howk

"Cynthia belonged to the generation that went on Sunday afternoon drives. As they rode along, her father and mother would point out interesting houses and tell her the stories behind them, e.g., a house whose stone façade came from the demolition of an earlier structure. Cynthia brought this early schooling to her life's work, sharing her enthusiasm for architecture and local history and infecting the rest of us with her zeal for preservation."
-Mary Jo Lanphear
Brighton Town Historian

"*Richard's knowledge, generosity, and enduring committment to preservation leave a lasting legacy in the buildings saved, the histories documented, and the countless people he inspired.*"
-Landmark Society of Western New York

Portrait of Richard Reisem

The Life and Death of the Terrence Building

By *Eli Fybush, Historic Brighton Trustee*

Most Brightonians and Rochesterians have driven past the old Terrence Building on Elmwood Avenue, and its imposing stature has intrigued many. On June 9th, 2026, Governor Kathy Hochul promised $20 million toward the redevelopment of the site into affordable housing. To mark this, let's take a look back at the history of the Terrence Building.

The Terrence Building's story begins in 1897 when the Rochester State Hospital (having taken over the Monroe County Insane Asylum) acquired land along Monroe Avenue to construct a new asylum. In the 1930s, the complex was expanded, adding the Howard and Walters buildings, which were also abandoned alongside the Terrance Building in the 1990s.

In 1959 the Terrence Building opened, straddling the Brighton-Rochester border. The new building featured 1,000 beds across 16 stories. At the time it was considered sleek and modern; offering a more humane approach to psychiatric care. This was unfortunately not the case by today's standards, as many patients were considered hopeless cases and were locked up for months, years, or even life, to keep them out of the public eye. Treatment consisted mostly of isolation, electroshock therapy, drugs, and even lobotomies. The building was divided into two wings, east and west, with the elevators in the middle, meaning patients on one side couldn't even interact with patients on the other. Ultimately, life inside the Terrence Building has been described by former patients in one word: dehumanizing.

In 1960 Rochester State Hospital (which became the Rochester Psychiatric Center in 1970) had expanded to 5,000 beds and 200 acres, in large part due to the inclusion of the Terrence Building. However, by that time, views began to change. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Act which changed mental healthcare,

The Terrence Building in 1958 after construction was completed, photo from Democrat & Chronicle archives

promoting deinstitutionalization and rehabilitation. It would also be the last bill he signed before his assassination. The last lobotomy in the United States was performed in 1967, and the Terrence Building had begun to outlive the practices which it had been built to sustain. However, the Terrence Building continued to operate and there were attempts to modernize, but life within its walls remained dehumanizing throughout its existence.

As the 70s and 80s came and went, the Terrence Building became difficult to justify operating, as the state continued shifting from sprawling asylums to smaller local rehabilitation programs. In 1995, the Terrence Building finally closed, and the remaining patients were relocated to the newer buildings within the Rochester Psychiatric Center complex.

The lobby of the abandoned Terrence Building, which closed in 1995, photo credit to architecturalafterlife.com

The imposing facade of the Terrence Building looming over Rochester and Brighton, photo from Democrat & Chronicle archives

Following its closure, the building was totally abandoned. To this day, the site remains frozen in time: the fake plants in the lobby still hang from the ceiling like they were put up yesterday; faded signs directing long-gone visitors cling to the walls; and expired medicine bottles still litter the floors as lead paint peels from nearly every surface; shattered window glass lies across the ground, and plywood covers the entrances.

Like many abandoned psychiatric hospitals and other urban ruins, the Terrence Building became the subject of many ghost stories, and a destination for urban explorers, which created the need for stronger security measures for the building. Several plans had been proposed over the years for the redevelopment of the large, empty tower, but the cost has always been too high.

With the much-needed demolition of the decaying tower, and the subsequent creation of affordable housing units in its place, the site of the Terrence Building is facing a shift from being a place people wanted to leave behind, to one people might seek to enter. The resulting outcome will be the opposite of everything the old State Hospital represented: instead of dehumanizing its unfortunate occupants, it will be a new, humane community built for the needs of its residents.

HB