

Isabella Dorsey

Isabella Dorsey wasn't born in Brighton but much of her important life's work occurred here.

About 1910, Mrs. Dorsey began opening her home on Bronson Avenue to orphaned and neglected children. She supported the home by doing washing and domestic service; Mr. Dorsey worked as a chauffeur but often during 1914 the Home was without coal and food

That year a local newspaper reporter learned about Mrs. Dorsey's situation and went to interview her about the home. He learned that she was interested in having a board oversee the operations so he went to Rochester Police Chief Joseph M. Quigley to enlist his support. Quigley formed a group made up of leading citizens and community members. Some of the original participants were Chief Quigley, Mrs. J. Warren Cutler, wife of the mail chute manufacturer; Mrs. George Hollister, wife of a real estate developer; Mrs. Abram Katz, policewoman Nellie McElroy; James McMullen, pastor of the AME Zion Church; Dr. Edward Mulligan; Daniel B. Murphy, business executive; Augustine O'Neill, rector of Immaculate Conception Church; Rebecca Rosenberg, and Armand Wyle, superintendent of the Jewish Orphan Asylum. The board incorporated the Home on June 5, 1913. In June of 1914 the board assisted the Dorseys in relocating to larger quarters on a farm south of Forest Lawn when the house on Bronson Avenue became over-crowded. Twenty-four children lived in the farmhouse at Forest Lawn. In 1916 Mrs. Dorsey made a Christmas appeal for toys and clothing for the children. Some of the older boys used the farm acreage to grow vegetables for the home's kitchen but the location was proving unsuitable so the decision was made in 1918 to purchase for \$15,000 the Highland View Stock Farm in Brighton on the southeast corner of Clinton and Elmwood Avenues where McQuaid Jesuit High School is now. The property consisted of a large farm house on twenty-six acres with an orchard but extensive work was necessary to make the place livable for the large group. In 1919 the board of the Dorsey Home for Dependent Colored Children expended \$10,000 for a large addition on the east side of the house, the installation of electricity, plumbing, and modern bathrooms. These improvements enabled the Home to care for 35 children from the ages of two to sixteen. The farm had horses, cows, pigs, and chickens and produced enough vegetables, fruit, and eggs to feed the children. Raising pigs for market added needed cash for the Home as did the growing of hay, wheat, oats, and beans.

The older children attended Brighton #2 school at the corner of Elmwood and Clover but the youngest attended kindergarten in a remodeled tenant house on the farm.

Even with an administrative board, the care of the children fell to Mr. and Mrs. Dorsey, a teacher, and a few general helpers. A newspaper in that era reported that the Dorsey Home was the only "colored" orphanage in the state outside New York City. Funding for the day-to-day operation of the Home came from children with relatives able to contribute to their care. Children sent by governments and other public agencies paid \$5.00 per week per child but the amount was insufficient for the actual cost of care. The local Community Chest, the forerunner of the present-day United Way, made up the difference. Local doctors provided medical care when necessary at no charge to the Home.

By 1922, Isabella Dorsey had enough day-to-day help in running the home that she was able to consider opening a similar facility in another community. The Seventh-Day Adventists from Quaker Bridge, NY, offered her two buildings on the grounds of the old Fernwood Academy to establish the Bella Dorsey Home and Industrial School.

The Dorsey Home on Clinton Avenue in Brighton did not survive the Depression. Children sent from other communities, including many from the New York metropolitan area, were insufficiently funded and the local Community Chest could not make up the difference in the face of diminishing resources in the Depression.

Isabella Dorsey died at her home in Carr's Corners on June 2, 1932. The funeral was in Randolph and burial in Steamburg Cemetery,

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