

The Council Rock

Travelers along East Avenue may wonder about the huge rock located on the Stone-Tolan property, not far from Clover Street. This is the famous Council Rock about which there is as much folklore as fact.

The facts: the rock is a glacial erratic, a stone that is different than the rocks native to the area in which the erratic rests. Herman LeRoy Fairchild described it as Lockport limestone and “a real stone monument of the Glacial Period.” He went on to say that the ice sheets often strewed the land with immense blocks of stone although the fifty-ton Council Rock is of only moderate size. (*Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series Volume VIII, p. 76*)

Orringh Stone chose the location for his tavern because it was close to the rock and two important trails used by the native people, insuring its patronage by travelers and settlers.

With the advent of the automobile in the early 1900s, paved roads replaced rutted, muddy farm lanes. In October 1904, the contractors paving Penfield Road were given permission to blow up the nearby Council Rock and use the resulting gravel for pavement. The Brighton Town Board, with Supervisor A. Emerson Babcock at its head, took action and voted to put a fence around the rock. A year later, Supervisor Babcock, working with New York State Senator Morton Lewis, persuaded the State Legislature to pass a law protecting the Council Rock in perpetuity and to establish a five-member Seneca Council Rock Commission to oversee and protect the rock.

In 1919 the Rochester Historical Society affixed a plaque to the top of the rock, commemorating the native people’s history in the area. In 1924 it was moved from its original location at the intersection of East Avenue and Clover Street to the southeast corner of East Avenue and Council Rock Avenue. In 1931 it was moved again to the southwest corner of the same intersection, to property owned by Benjamin Forman, owner of the B. Forman department store.

Subsequent owners of the former Forman property were not happy about sightseers traipsing through their flower beds to view the rock so in 1974, the Landmark Society of Western New York agreed to have it moved across East Avenue to the front of the Stone-Tolan House property. There was a hitch when the cable on the forty-ton crane broke due to the weight of the fifty-ton Rock. The next day an eighty-ton crane successfully lifted the Rock across East Avenue to its permanent home. Fun fact: there is as much of the rock below the ground as there is above the ground.

The folklore: The name Council Rock comes from the rock’s place in local legend. It is said to have been the site of tribal meetings or councils during Haudenosaunee time. The famous orator, Red Jacket (called “He Keeps Them Awake”), stood on the rock and addressed the gathered people.

Pioneer settler Gershom Dunham is said to have leapt upon the Council Rock to get away from a bear in pursuit of dinner.

The pocked Rock contains many small nooks suitable for the concealment of paper notes. In the pre-telephone age, school children are said to have used the Rock as a message center, arranging play dates and sharing gossip.

Fact or folklore, the Council Rock is Brighton's oldest landmark, predating both the native people and the early settlers by thousands of years.

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