

The Friendly Home at 175 years

Celebrations are happening this year at the Friendly Home on East Avenue in Brighton. Established in the city of Rochester in 1849 as the Rochester Home for the Friendless, the mission of the organization was to provide temporary shelter and employment to “females of good moral character destitute of friends.” Having a safe home would discourage young woman from falling into bad company in this era long before social programs and community support.

After some relocations in the early years, in 1853 the Home moved to a former tavern at the corner of East Avenue and Alexander Street and was able to add children and older women to its guest list. These additional people brought the resources of the Home to capacity, causing the need for more space. In 1913 the Home purchased a little over thirteen acres of land near Allen’s Creek in Brighton. Finding it difficult to acquire the necessary funds for the project, the board of trustees reached out to George Eastman for a substantial contribution but, according to some accounts, along with the donation, he stipulated that the Home must begin accepting male residents.

After the move to Brighton, the Home still sheltered some homeless people but, as the years went on, the focus was on providing a home for older people. By 1935, the average age of a member was eighty

The Home on the Brighton campus was completed in February of 1918. Residents moved into a spacious brick building that contained a conservatory, a library, a men’s smoking room, and a women’s sewing room. Noted landscape architect Alling DeForest, of nearby Allen’s Creek Road, designed the gardens and included plots where residents could grow vegetables and fruits.

And how did it come to be called “The Friendly Home?” According to Elizabeth Brayer (*“150 Years Young: the Story of the Friendly Home”*), the name “Home for the Friendless” had bothered people for many years. Brayer quoted Miss Minnie A. Bellows who said, “if they are friendless, it isn’t necessary or kind to publish the fact, and moreover those who give their time and their means to carry on the work of the institution are their friends.” In 1906 the lady managers chose the name “Rochester Home for the Aged,” but the board of trustees objected, saying that there were already too many homes for the aged, citing the Jewish Home, the Episcopal Home, and the German Home for the Aged (now St. John’s). In October of 1915, two years after the move to Brighton, the home became the Rochester Friendly Home. In 1994, the word “Rochester” was dropped. Occupants of the Home became “members” instead of “inmates.”

Today the Home has a skilled nursing facility, a special unit for dementia patients, and a transitional care center. The campus also includes Linden Knoll, a six-story, 148-apartment, independent living complex adjacent to the original building.

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