

WEST BRIGHTON

"East is east and west is west, and never the twain shall meet" begins Margaret MacNab's 1979 booklet about West Brighton. Mrs. MacNab, the former Town of Brighton historian, used Rudyard Kipling's phrase to describe the apparent separation of the area of West Brighton from the larger town. She went on to say that West Brighton is a compact community but for all its low profile, it has exerted a great influence on town government. Indeed, many of the town of Brighton's supervisors, town council, and other officials have come from the west side of town.

Environmentally, the west part of Brighton differs dramatically from the rest of the Town. Lying along the lowland next to the Genesee River, the farmland and residential tracts were subject to the vicissitudes of the river and endured many floods over the years until the completion of the Mount Morris Dam in 1952. According to the Army Corps of Engineers, from 1865 to 1950 a major flood ravaged the Genesee River Valley on an average of every seven years. Dealing with flood damage to crops, houses, and businesses West Brighton residents developed a resilience and pride in their ability to cope that contributed to a sense of independence from the rest of the town.

What constitutes West Brighton? Certainly, the area between the river and East Henrietta Road but many nineteenth century farmers between Clinton Avenue and Winton Road considered themselves part of the west side of town. Many of the nineteenth century decennial censuses divide Brighton into two districts: #1 on the east side and #2 on the west side with the area near Winton Road as the separation point.

Near the intersection of East and West Henrietta Roads a small cluster of businesses offered farm services such as blacksmithing and wagon repair. Here's what the 1869 Monroe County directory says:

"West Brighton (postal village) is near the Genesee River, south of Rochester, and contains two hotels, a wagon shop, two blacksmith shops, and about twenty houses. Near this place are located the Monroe County Penitentiary, Alms House, Insane Asylum, Mount Hope Cemetery, and several manufactories. The Monroe County Fairgrounds of twenty acres is located in this vicinity..."

The Fairgrounds included a half-mile racetrack on what is now Crittenden Blvd. Charles Meitzler's West Brighton House was one of the two hotels mentioned. It was often the site of Brighton town meetings. Reflecting society's changed attitude toward the unfortunate, the large brick County buildings along South Avenue were razed in 1966.

At 1956 West Henrietta Road stands a documented Underground Railroad site, Thomas Warrant's stately white Italianate farmhouse. Thomas Warrant, an immigrant from England in 1819, was a coppersmith and ardent abolitionist. Sheltered in the loft of the rear section of the house, freedom seekers were passed along to other safe houses on their way to the Lake and boats that would

take them to Canada. The last Warrant to live there was Cora Warrant who saved the house twice from proposed demolition because of canal relocation and expressway construction. Miss Warrant died in 1971.

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