



HISTORIC BRIGHTON NEWS

VOLUME 7

SPRING 2006

NUMBER 2

BOB MARCOTTE TO SPEAK TO HISTORIC BRIGHTON

ON *BIRDS OF THE GENESEE*

AND THE STORIES OF THOSE WHO WATCH THEM

SUNDAY, APRIL 30 AT 3 PM, BRIGHTON TOWN HALL

Bob Marcotte, who many know best as the “Just Ask” columnist of the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, spent ten years researching his new book, *Birds of the Genesee*—without realizing that he would one day write it.

Now author/birder Marcotte will share some of the aspects of local birding that he learned himself during those years. For instance, nearly four hundred species of wild birds have been reported in what the New York State Ornithological Association designates the Genesee Region. Lake Ontario is both a barrier and a magnet to hundreds of thousands of migrating birds that funnel along its shores and over its waters each year.

Marcotte is an avid birder, leading field trips and participating in Christmas counts and other bird monitoring projects. So bring your questions and comments and enjoy a lively discussion about about all those birds of the Genesee.

A native of Lawrence, Kansas, Marcotte worked for Kansas newspapers before coming to Rochester in 1976, originally to work as a beat reporter for the *Times-Union*.

Marcotte is also the author of *Where They Fell: Stories of Rochester Area Soldiers in the Civil War*. Members of Historic Brighton and their friends will remember the wonderful talk he gave about that subject several years ago.

ACCENT ON BRIGHTON AS A SUBURB: ESPECIALLY, THE HOUSTON BARNARD AREA

BRIGHTON WAS FIRST A SPRAWLING FARMING community and then a roaring canal village before it finally evolved into a sedate automobile suburb. This issue of *Historic Brighton News* examines some aspects of its suburban phase through a fable of life in the Houston Barnard tract during the late 1920s.



The exodus to suburbia was originally seen as a good thing—a way to escape smokey urban conditions for life in fresh air and green pastures.

Brighton as a suburb

LIFE IN THE ECLECTIC HOUSTON BARNARD TRACT

By Elizabeth Brayer

The year is 1929. The heroine of our tale, a resident of Ambassador Drive, has just finished breakfasting with her husband and is preparing for a day of shopping in downtown Rochester. Her husband has left in his Stutz Brougham and is motoring down the Avenue of the Presidents, East Avenue, past the house of his company's president, George Eastman, and the houses of the presidents and vice presidents of Bausch & Lomb, the Gleason Works, the Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Co. and other such Rochester fixtures. The rising sun hits the rear window of the husband's car on his way as the setting sun will on his way home. Developers such as Houston Barnard know not to locate suburban subdivisions west of the city where commuters would be forever driving into the sun.



Our heroine leaves the breakfast dishes and the care of her pre-school children to the live-in maid and walks to the attached garage for her roadster. Although homeowners in other parts of Brighton have converted barns and carriage houses into garages or built new detached garages to the rear of the property, Houston Barnard wishes to avoid that spotty look and insists that there be only one structure per lot with no outbuildings. He knows too, that these new garages can be unsightly holes full of gardening equipment, and so has written into the subdivision specifications that garages must not open onto the street side. Carrying the new idea that front and side yards are part of the suburban community as well as belonging to the individual property owner further, Barnard has also banished that staple of earlier residential areas: the front porch of modest homes or the front verandah of Victorian mansions where people sat on swings of a summer evening to chat with the passing world.



Even George Eastman has homely rocking chairs under the portico of his neo-Georgian mansion. In 1903, Claude Bragdon designed a sweeping verandah for the Country Club of Rochester that also masqueraded as a Tudor mansion on property near the Houston Barnard subdivision.

Mr. Barnard has other rules pertaining to how close a house can be from its neighbor or the distance of a lot-line hedge from the sidewalk. Houses



must have a minimum value and all be two-and-one-half stories. This last insures a continuity of roof lines (somewhat like the mansard roofs of Paris) throughout the tract. The low Prairie houses of Frank Lloyd Wright, prototype of the Post World War II ranch house, are banned, but so is the one-upmanship of the full three-story Victorian house. And that top half story, a roof whose mass is punctuated by dormers, allows sufficient space for servants quarters. These rules remained in force throughout Barnard's lifetime but not beyond.

Our heroine's roadster reaches downtown Rochester in less than ten minutes, a straight shot down East Avenue which is what developers of automobile suburbs such as Houston Barnard consider in choosing their parcels. There is a subway that begins (and terminates) in Brighton Village, a small shopping center at Winton Road and East Ave. that

THE ECLECTIC HOUSTON BARNARD TRACT



the city annexed in 1905, leaving the Town of Brighton without a center. The subway follows the old Erie Canal bed that veers away from, rather than toward, the downtown shopping area. And to board the subway, our heroine would have to drive to the station, hardly a prescription for successful mass transit. Indeed, this may be the smallest metropolitan area ever to have a subway.



There is no such thing as a mall in midtown or suburban Rochester. Instead, within two blocks of the parked, unlocked roadster, there are three major, well-stocked department stores—Sibley's, McCurdy's, Edwards—several five-and dime stores, Forman's specialty women's store, McFarland's and the National for men, Scrantom's stationers and booksellers, Scheer's and Hershberg's jewelers. Nearby are a host of restaurants, banks, movie palaces, and theaters such as the Lyceum, Cook's Opera House, and the elegant Eastman Theatre where our suburban family may catch a matinee or evening silent movie accompanied by pit orchestra five days a week, or hear the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra play on Thursday evenings under the direction of one of its British conductors, Albert Coates and Eugene Goosens.

If our heroine is lunching downtown with friends they may choose to meet at the cosmopolitan Manhattan Restaurant or at the more whimsical Sibley's Tower Restaurant. Private clubs such



as the Chatterbox, Genesee Valley, University, or Rochester Clubs are equally within striking distance. If the group is feeling adventuresome, they may opt for the new Corner Club, where a wonderful international group gathers. The group consists of musicians, professors, stage and opera directors assembled to launch the Eastman School of Music. Families of the young faculty members of the new medical school, or of the Kodak Research Laboratories, both also created by George Eastman, meet here too. There is a new and electric international spirit to Rochester in 1929. To walk into the Corner Club in 1929 is akin to walking into a restaurant in Miami's South Beach in 2006: one is as likely to overhear French, German, Spanish, Russian, Hungarian, Italian, and so forth spoken as to hear American English with a flat Rochester "A."



At the end of a full day, our heroine motors home, again in eight minutes, since rush hour traffic is not yet a problem. She may stop at Wolf's Market or DeWolf's Market in Brighton Village to complete her dinner menu. Back on Ambassador Drive, she stops to open a garage door encased in a stone arch mounted in a stucco background, then drives into a cement block cell illuminated by a bare light bulb. Mounting two steps, she enters a small, basic, nondescript, cream-painted kitchen where someone else is in charge—except on "maids-night-out." From there she goes into a miniature yet elegant great hall where carved

THE ECLECTIC HOUSTON BARNARD TRACT



woodwork and leaded glass windows abound. She skips upstairs to the ceramic tile and chrome bathroom, experiencing no sense of time warp or incongruity as she passes from an historical space into a modern utilitarian one, and no desire that the great hall be made more utilitarian or the bathroom more historical.

The husband is already ensconced in the paneled living room with its massive beams of varnished boards, down a few steps from the great hall. He is seated in a wing chair before the roaring fire set in a cast cement fireplace, sipping his best Prohibition Scotch and pondering a manifesto calling for a new architecture that will revolution-



ize society. He shrugs. For modern architecture with its abstention from the historic styles, particularly the work of Le Corbusier, Gropius, Wright, or Mies, to be seen as the salvation of society is just too absurd. Yet since 1927 the turmoil and split in the world of architecture is real. Originality rather than taste is becoming the criterion, with modernistic architecture eventually nudging out the eclectic historic styles. (One of the fascinating things about the Houston Barnard Subdivision today is that, because lot sales and construction were so slowed by the Depression and World War II, the area exhibits a whole range of the architectural trends and wars that occurred between 1920 and 1980.)

The original architecture of the Houston Barnard Subdivision was Eclectic with a capital E—a strong trend if not an actual movement-cum-manifesto in American architecture between about 1875 and 1940. As such it gave us a plethora of Gothic churches, Byzantine synagogues, Roman banks, and Georgian, Tudor, Jacobean, Cotswold, Cape Cod, Spanish, Mediterranean, French Eclectic and Pueblo houses. It also produced major and diverse architects such as Henry Hobson



Richardson, Richard Morris Hunt, Charles Follen McKim, Stanford White, Ralph Adams Cram, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, John Russell Pope, Charles Platt, and Royal Barry Wills.

Unlike the mid-Victorian architect who pasted historical ornamental kitsch on a nightmare of mansard roofs, brownstone fronts, raw red brick or a mishmash of shingles, the Eclectics studied all aspects of an historic style including scale, proportions, massing, colors, and textures. They felt free to introduce variations of their own, synthesizing several styles, editing the past. Good materials and craftsmanship were part of the mix, and the mass immigration during the 1920s of Italian master craftsmen trained through the apprentice system reinforced this. With no such system in place in this country, there were no subsequent generations of craftsmen.

The individual houses in the Houston Barnard Subdivision had individual architects or firms, Rochester-based or from elsewhere. Mr. Barnard



THE ECLECTIC HOUSTON BARNARD TRACT



apparently did not employ just one architect or firm or even have a list from which his clients must chose. But if they were casting about for suggestions, he undoubtedly made them.



The Frank Gannett house was designed by the firm of Arnold & Stern. From 1900 until 1915 architect James Arnold (1881-1957) worked in the office of Claude Bragdon (1866-1944), one of the area's best known architects and a cult figure because of his charm, skill as a raconteur, artistic talents, and mystical writings on spiritualism.

"Jimmy" Arnold drew like an angel and local sources say that many Bragdon renderings were actually executed by Arnold. Herbert Stern (1882-1980), Arnold's partner from 1915 to 1932, started in the office of Leon Stern, architect of Brighton's three Tudor firehouses.

In 1936, F. Ritter Shumway employed Howard L. Stone to prepare plans for his Ambassador Drive house. Plans labeled Gordon & Kaelber and dated between 1920 and 1935 could be Stone designs.



Architects listed as active in the 1918 Rochester City Directory include C. Storrs Barrows, Claude Bragdon, F. A. Brockett, Brockett and Wood, Foster & Gade, Crandall & Strobel, Gordon & Madden, George Hutchison, Howard Nurse, J. Mills Platt, and J. Foster Warner.



Thomas Boyde, a native of Washington D.C., and a graduate of Brown and Syracuse Universities, practiced first in New York City, but in 1930 came to Rochester to work for Siegmund Firestone, specifically on the design of the Monroe County Hospital. Legend has it that Firestone, a native of Romania and architect of building for Bausch and Lomb, Stromberg Carlson, Highland Hospital, B. Forman Co., the Iola Sanitarium, and the JYMA and WA, did not know that Boyde was black until the young architect alighted from the Empire State Limited. Boyde stayed on in Rochester, working for several other firms and after 1951 in independent practice until his death about 1980. He designed quite a few of the homes in the Houston Barnard Subdivision.



Brighton as a suburb
THE ORIGIN OF SUBURBS

By Elizabeth Brayer

THE ORIGIN OF SUBURBS can be traced to the booming expansion of London during the reign of George III. Horse-drawn coaches for the newly prosperous merchant class aided the building of a highway system and country estates that led to new towns. Since early English suburbs consisted of populations associated with the country estates of the gentry, a pattern was set for the future of suburban imagery.

The tradition of the planned suburb flourished from 1790 to 1930. It includes such Brighton subdivisions as Meadowbrook, Houston Barnard, and Browncroft. Post World War II Levittown is different.

WHAT IS A SUBURB?

According to architect Robert A. M. Stern, the suburb is a planning type, a state of mind based on imagery and symbolism. This symbolism includes curved roads, sidewalks, street lamps, tended lawns, pitched roofs, shuttered windows, and “colonial or otherwise decorated and elaborated doorways.” Freestanding houses on a tree-lined street form the dominant impression of a suburb, whether or not that freestanding building is a single-family house or a high-density condominium.

The suburb is arguably the most characteristic form of American urbanism. Most Americans live in the suburbs. Yet it remains the most uncharted and perhaps the most denigrated pattern of all. Architects ignore suburban housing and planning in favor of massive urban renewal projects or the monumental tower in a park. But once upon a time, famous names such as McKim, Mead & White, Frederick Law Olmsted, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, and John Nolen, tackled the suburb.

Suburbs bespeak communities that value the tradition of the family, pride of ownership, and the advantages of rural life. Some of the problems and limitations of suburbs include the dependency on the automobile for virtually any social intercourse. Others involve the architectural banality of the houses themselves.

EARLY SUBURBS

The first American suburbs were industrial villages such as Lowell MA. In 1822 the Boston Manufacturing Co., a textile firm, set the precedent for many industrial villages. Apparently designed to the principles of the company’s founder, Francis Cabot Lowell (d. 1817), Lowell featured boarding houses run by matrons of impeccable reputation for young women who worked in the mill. Compulsory Bible classes and church attendance were proscribed.

Another early suburb was Saltaire in Yorkshire, England, 1851, a key monument in the evolution of the Garden City and its stepchild, the Garden Suburb. (Columbia, MD is a direct descendant.) Developed by Sir Titus Salt, a successful industrialist whose fortune was made in the wool trade, Saltaire consisted of 49 acres: 10 for the factory, 14 for the park, and the rest for houses and streets. It was densely populated—800 Venetian Gothic houses and 90 people per acre with no private gardens—subject to the same criticism as such a development would be today. However, the careful massing and composition of the buildings somehow avoided the monotony of endless rows.

PULLMAN, ILLINOIS

Pullman, on a 4,000-acre site 13 miles from Chicago’s center, was the first romantic industrial village built in the U.S. Perhaps it was also the first collaboration between architect and landscape designer in establishing a new community. It grew out of George Pullman’s simultaneously idealistic and opportunistic beliefs that a well-designed industrial complex was not incompatible with an environment for family life and that such an arrangement would benefit wage earner and owner alike.

The virtues of suburbs like Pullman are forgotten. In 1880 it was called “the most perfect city in the world.” Fourteen years later it was devastated by bloody strikes. It was almost destroyed in 1960 for an industrial park.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUBURBS:

Industrialization led to increased prosperity for many and the rise of a middle class. It also meant better public transportation (the railroad and streetcar), giving workers a greater choice of where to live. The downside of industrialization was the environmental problems it created in the urban core. Many who perceived that crowding and other evils contributed to the moral problems of the age, thus damaging family and spiritual life, were ready and financially able to flee to the suburbs.

SUBURBAN ARCHITECTURE

The suburban house became a special type in its own right, not merely a stripped down manor house nor a farmhouse, both of which involve a lifestyle economically connected to the land. Instead, the suburban house evolved in response to the requirements of efficient, servantless domesticity and the need to reconcile the scale of the house with the forms brought about by suburban transportation.

The suburban house offers to its users a comprehensible image of independence and privacy while accepting the responsibility of the community. This, commentators have noted, is what front, back, and side yards are about.

The typical suburban house draws unabashedly from styles of the pre-industrial past. By the late 19th century the suburban house had become a mechanism for the establishment and re-establishment of appropriate national styles. Thus Charles Rennie Mackintosh used the vernacular Scottish house, Sir Edwin Lutyens revived the Queen Anne style. On this side of the Atlantic, the Shingle Style of McKim, Mead & White was an interpretation of the salt box architecture of pre-Georgian New England while the same firm's Colonial Revival style (such as the George Eastman House) was a reinterpretation of the Adamesque, Georgian, and the Colonial styles of early Republican periods.

Andrew Jackson Downing was the most influential 19th century American architect for the suburbs, establishing through his plans and pattern books the principles of the asymmetrical, eclectic, picturesque house. This was Victoriana at its height.

By the 1920s Tudoresque was a favorite of American architects, developers, and suburban homeowners. In each case the new suburban architecture was never an archeological reproduction of past styles but an eclectic evocation of an earlier period.

No architecture has had more influence than that of Frank Lloyd Wright, an American pragmatist who abandoned the traditional gable- or temple-fronted building for a very low hip roof. This became the model for the ranch house which has peppered suburbia since World War II. Wright had even more impact on landscape and townscape planning. The ranch house is typified by a low hip roof, a carport, and lots of glass and does not fit the narrow, deep lots of traditional suburbs. Thus the newer suburbs have square lots. Wright's aptly titled "clover-leaf" site plans of the late 1930s have had a tremendous impact on suburban land planning.

Revival architecture took root not only in single isolated houses but in whole suburban developments. In many cases the local vernacular architecture is linked with a European prototype—for example, in Chestnut Hill, PA, designs romantically evocative of farm houses of Normandy are combined with the local vernacular stone houses of Germantown, Pennsylvania.

Regionalism in suburban architecture emerged as the shingle and colonial styles were rejected in many parts of the Midwest, South, and West as too closely associated with the East Coast. Suburbia encouraged the development of regional styles even in areas where no regional styles existed.

"Contrary to the modernist polemic," architect Robert A. M. Stern has written, "the pursuit of regional styles has not thwarted technological innovation or confounded the move toward abstraction."

ARCHITECTS ABANDON SUBURBS

But at the same time that suburbs burgeoned to unprecedented size following World War II, modernist architects turned their attention either to architectural mass production for the masses based on

THE ORIGIN OF SUBURBS (continued)

the architectural premise that “less is more” or to one-of-a-kind monuments exemplified by museums and office buildings. The typical post-war suburb was left to developers and builders who offered a few cookie cutter styles from which to choose. As the car became a central feature of American life, architects increasingly treated it as a problem rather than an asset.

Without the intervention of the best architects, the auto suburb has developed as either an enlargement of older suburbs or the thoughtless surrounding of cities with blankets of low-density housing interrupted by strips of commercial development.

A COLLECTION OF SMALL TOWNS

Even London, once the largest city in the world, is, like Greater Rochester and Los Angeles, a collection of small towns. Outside of Manhattan, much of New York is a city of semi-attached houses interspersed with apartment blocks of six stories or less. Architect Stern thinks that it is time to think of old buildings and recognizable forms as other than worthless and wrong, and also time to realize that new suburbs need not always grow on virgin land. Suburban sprawl may be execrable but in the end the—

SUBURBS ARE HERE TO STAY

We must learn to live with them, minimizing the sprawl while maximizing the planning. The automobile and its step child, the ubiquitous shopping mall, has made it highly unlikely that communities will ever again consist of a strong central downtown surrounded by the bedroom suburbs of the pre-automobile era.

WHO WAS HOUSTON BARNARD?

Yes, the Houston Barnard Realty Co referred to a real person—just one, not two. To find out more about Mr. Barnard, check out earlier issues of the Historic Brighton News. An historical sketch of him appears on page 7 of the Vol. 1, No. 2 issue (Winter 2000), His property and business enterprises are mentioned on pp. 1-2 of the, Vol. 5, No. 1 issue (Winter 2004). For an index of other subjects in other newsletters by Patricia Aslin, go to www.historicbrighton.org.



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