



The Houston Barnard tracts as seen in the 1918 plat map. Note the misspelling: Bernard in place of Barnard.

WHO WAS HOUSTON BARNARD?

By Betsy Brayer

MANY OF US KNOW that there are two tracts in Brighton bearing the name "Houston Barnard." But how many know who he was?

Houston Barnard (1871-1936) was a Rochester engineer, businessman, developer, and yachtsman. A graduate of the Rochester Free Academy, he studied civil engineering in various local offices, with the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railroad, and with Le Grand Brown. At age 21 he became the chief engineer of the trolley system known as the Rochester Railways, and is identified in the reconstruction of that system during its transition to electric operation. He also laid out the Summerville Railway line and boulevard.

Barnard was New York's assistant superintendent of public works in charge of the western part of the state under governors Roosevelt (Teddy), Odell, and Higgins. He was the general contractor for the Cobbs Hill reservoir 1908-1911, the Utica and Tonawanda improvement of the New York Central Railroad, and contracts for the construction of the Barge Canal. As president of the New York State Dredging Co. he dug the first tunnel under the Hudson River, a project begun in 1902 and completed in 1908. He worked on the reclamation of Back Bay in Boston.

Barnard became identified with the physical growth of the Rochester area. He laid out numerous streets and tracts in the city and county. Some

of these were held in the name of his wife, Katherine Barnard. Realizing that the future belonged to the suburbs, the Barnard Development Co., with offices in the Powers Building and at East Avenue and Grosvenor Road, began developing, in the words of his ads, "important real estate enterprises of high character and residential purposes."

About 1918 he acquired two tracts in Brighton: one bound by Gould Street, the Council Rock Tract, Highland Ave. and East Ave. He developed this tract first: By 1930 there were 21 houses on the new Grosvenor Road and 15 on the new Pelham Road. By comparison, in 1930 there were 12 houses on Ambassador Drive, 10 houses on Sandringham Road, and 6 houses on Trevor Court.

The second tract was part of the Emerson Babcock farm. At first the streets were named Orchard Road and Cherry Road. But Barnard opted for tonier designations. Their British connotations may indicate that he was aware of the Anglo-American roots of the planned garden suburb which thrived roughly 1870 to 1940. Orchard Road became Ambassador Drive, with lots of at least 100-foot frontages. Cherry Road became Sandringham Road with frontages of at least 100 feet on the south side and 75 on the north. Cornelia Street became Georgian Court, Morris Drive became Esplanade, and a new street, Trevor Court Road, was drawn between Georgian Court and Ambassador Drive with frontages of at least 60 feet.

Who was Houston Barnard?

Houston Barnard, engineer, businessman, and yachtsman was born in Rochester in 1871. He died in Nice, France, in 1936 at the age of 65. His father, who came from New Hampshire, was a famous miner of the California gold rush and one of the few who was successful. The elder Barnard retired to Rochester and died in 1907 in his 80s. The mother died in 1888 when Houston Barnard was 17. Her family, the Houstons, conducted a tavern on the Ridge Road which was the first stage stop between Rochester and Lewiston. Houston Barnard's maternal grandfather was a prominent area politician.

Houston Barnard attended the Rochester Free Academy, graduating in 1889. He studied civil engineering in various local offices, with the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railroad, and with Le Grand Brown. At the tender age of 21 he became the chief engineer of the trolley system known as the Rochester Railways, and is identified in the reconstruction of that system during its transition to electric operation. He also laid out the Summerville Railway line and boulevard.

He was New York's assistant superintendent of public works in charge of the western part of the state under the administrations of governors Roosevelt (i.e. Teddy), Odell, and Higgins.

He was the general contractor for the Cobbs Hill reservoir 1908-1911, the Utica and Tonawanda improvement of the New York Central Railroad, and several contracts for the construction of the Barge Canal. As president of the New York State Dredging Co. he dug the first tunnel under the Hudson River, a project begun in 1902 and completed in 1908. He also worked on the reclamation of Back Bay in Boston.

As a yachtsman in Lake Ontario and the Thousand Islands, he donated his cruiser *Qui Vive* to the U. S. government at the beginning of World War I. *Qui Vive* sailed to Norfolk under the command of Charles Van Voorhis and a Rochester crew and served as dispatch boat for the fleet at Hampton Roads.

As early as 1895 Houston Barnard became identified with the physical growth of the Rochester area. He laid out numerous streets and tracts in the city and county. Some of these were held in the name of his wife, Katherine Barnard. Realizing that the future belonged to the suburbs, he formed the Barnard Development Co., with offices in the Powers Building and at the corner of East Avenue and Grosvenor Road and began developing, in the words of his ads, "important real estate enterprises of high character and residential purposes." About 1918 or before he acquired two tracts in Brighton: one bound by the existing Gould Street and Council Rock Tract to the east and west, and by Highland and East Avenues to the north and south. He developed this tract first: By 1930 there were 21 houses on the new Grosvenor Road and 15 on the new Peinam Road. By comparison, in 1930 there were 12 houses on Ambassador Drive, 10 houses on Sandringham Road, and 6 houses on Trevor Court Road.

Barnard's ad in the 1930 Suburban Directory states, "Exclusive residential sites carefully restricted." While this may sound politically incorrect to modern ears, it seems evident from the variety of ethnicities represented in that 1930 directory, that the developer was more interested in restricting the heights and setbacks of the houses than the race, color or creed of the purchaser.

The second tract (i.e. Ambassador et al) was originally part of the Babcock farm. Emerson Babcock was then supervisor of Brighton. The main Babcock house, which was famous in the last century as a stop on the Underground Railroad, is the brick house where the Edward Harris

family lived for many years. In among the apple and pear orchards was a lime kiln, probably to make mortar for the brick factories which lined Monroe Avenue in Brighton from Cobbs Hill to the Twelve Corners. Barnard removed the kiln, and by the time the 1918 plat book had been printed, he had laid out curving roads with curbs, sidewalks, and street lamps. The roads went off of Clover Road and what was then called Morris Drive and Cornelia Street (now Esplanade and Georgian Court) in the Abraham Neelis Tract.

Barnard first named the new streets of his new tract Orchard Road and Cherry Road. At some point he opted for tonier designations. Their British connotations may indicate that Barnard was aware of the Anglo-American roots of the planned garden suburb which thrived from roughly 1870 to 1940. Under Barnard, Orchard Road became Ambassador Drive, and was extended to East Avenue, with lots of at least 100-foot frontages. Cherry Road became Sandringham Road with frontages of at least 100 feet on the south side and 75 on the north. Cornelia Street became Georgian Court, Morris Drive became Esplanade, and a new street, Trevor Court Road, was drawn between Georgian Court and Ambassador Drive with frontages of at least 60 feet.

Houston Barnard died in Nice France in 1936 at age 65. His wife had predeceased him and apparently there were no children. He had four unmarried sisters who survived him and lived together on Calumet Street. His residences included 7 Strathallan Park (in 1918), the Powers Hotel, and 68 Avondale Park. His Reynolds Street home was sold to the General Hospital.

From History of the Genesee Country, by L.R. Doty, 1925, S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Volume III, pages 787-788

Houston Barnard, born in Rochester 3 January 1871, son of William C. and Elvira C. Houston Barnard.

Father was from Acworth, New Hampshire, was a '49er, returned in 1855 "well-rewarded" for his efforts. Led more or less retired life on his return, died in 1907 at age 82.

Elvira Houston Barnard died in 1888. Her family was well-known in western NY. She was the daughter of Isaac Houston - he had a tavern on Ridge Road between Rochester and Lewiston. His hostelry was the first stage stop in stage coach days - horses were exchanged before continuing to Lewiston.

Houston Barnard attended Rochester Free Academy, graduated in 1889, took up the practice of civil engineering in various local offices and with the Buffalo, Rochester, and Pittsburgh Railroad. He was the chief engineer during the reconstruction of the trolley system to electric, and laid out the Summerville Railway Line and Boulevard.

He was the assistant superintendent of public works, western division of the state, under Governors Roosevelt, Odell, and Higgins. He constructed Cobb's Hill Reservoir, and the Tonawanda improvement of the New York Central Railroad. He held several contracts for construction of the Barge Canal.

He laid out numerous streets and tracts in all parts of the city, more recently developing real estate enterprises of high character for residential purposes in East Avenue.

President of Barnard Development Corporation, member of the Genesee Falls Lodge, Masonic order; Genesee Valley Club, Rochester Club, Thousand Islands Yacht Club, Lotos Club, NY.

He donated the cruiser "Qui Vivre" to the U. S. government at the beginning of World War I. It was taken to Norfolk, VA, and served as dispatch boat for the fleet at Hampton Roads until the close of the war, under the command of Charles H. Van Voorhis and a Rochester crew. The government presented Houston Barnard with a bronze tablet with suitable inscription.

From History of the Town of Brighton by A. Emerson Babcock, unpublished.

Transcript of newspaper obituary, with comments from Babcock:

"Barnard Body To Be Brought From France" April 27, 1936

Preparations were being made today for the return to Rochester of the body of Houston Barnard, 65, noted engineer developer who died in Nice, France, Saturday.

Advice of Mr. Barnard's death was received by his sisters, who live at 20 Calumet Street, in a cablegram from the American Consul at Nice, which said the Rochesterian died in his sleep in his hotel room, victim of a heart attack.

Instructions for shipment of the body to Rochester were cabled to the French Riviera resort.

In ill health for some time, Mr. Barnard sailed on a Mediterranean cruise two months ago in hope of improvement. The last message received from him here was a cablegram to his sisters April 12.

Born and educated in Rochester, Mr. Barnard became chief engineer of the old Rochester Railway Company, predecessor of Rochester Line of New York State Railways, when he was only twenty-one years of age.

Later he became in turn president of NY Dredging Company and was in charge of construction of Cobb's Hill Reservoir, the first Hudson tunnel, and other large projects. He also was the head of the Barnard Development Company.

As a realtor, he developed the residential sections of Pelham Road, Sandringham Road, and adjoining thoroughfares.

(Begin A.E. Babcock comments:) He making the finest development at this place of the A. Emerson Babcock farm where Mr. Babcock had lived for 77 years. This farm being the farm before it was purchased by him where Isaac Moore lived. The house on the property being built by Mr. Moore in 1829. The barn on the place being the first to be built on strictly temperance principles.

Failing health forced him out of business a year ago. He lived at 68 Avondale Park. For a time I am informed he lived in the Powers Hotel at Rochester.

Mrs. Barnard died many years ago. He leaves four sisters as follows:

Ida C. Barnard

Mary E. Barnard

Lucena A. Barnard

S. Louise Barnard

They all lived at the Calumet Street address.

M.S. Book #1 (Scrapbook Shelf at Local History Division, Rundel)

- p.116 Funeral of Houston Barnard
held 5/22/36 in Mount Hope Chapel
Rev. George Norton of St, Paul's Episcopal Church
Honorary bearers: nineteen
- p.124 will Democrat & Chronicle 6/4/36
"reputed to be worth \$5,000,000 before crash"
Houston Barnard left estate of only \$2,000
Left no realty, property passed to four sisters and two
daughters in NY City, and three friends
early in 1935 Houston Barnard was adjudged bankrupt
with liabilities of \$488,532 and assets of \$167,000

p.103

Democrat & Chronicle 4/27/1936

"Some years ago there was a lime kiln on the property. This was removed and Mr. Barnard subdivided and improved the section."

In earlier years he had lived on Reynolds Street in a home he sold to General Hospital