

The Gannett house: Barnard centerpiece

Jhis 17-room, 10,000-square-foot Gannett house on a 400-foot-wide lot at 195 Sandringham Rd. in Brighton is not exactly hidden. In fact it is the most visibly prominent and centrally located residence in the Houston Barnard Tract, one of the most distinguished neighborhoods in the Rochester area. This eight-bedroom mansion measures 200 ft. across the front of the building and sits on a lot that is 400 feet wide. Surrounded by trees, bushes, a motor court, a swimming pool, and formal gardens in the English country house manner, it is the largest and most important example of the 1920s revival style in the area.

Like many other houses in the Houston Barnard neighborhood which was begun in the twenties and filled in fits and starts over the decades, the Gannett house is notable for the integrity of its architectural design, the quality of its materials and workmanship, and its imposing scale. It represents a kind of period "great home," which is no longer being constructed.

The Gannett house was designed and built in 1928-1929 by the architectural firm of Arnold and Stern for Dr. C. Sahler Hornbeck, a dentist. It was sold to Frank and Caroline Werner Gannett in 1933. It was given by Mrs. Gannett to the University of Rochester in 1977. (She died in 1979; her husband had died in 1957.) The house was sold to Dr. Frank and Barbara DeLaus in 1979. In 1984 it was put on the market for \$850,00. In July 1991 Mrs. DeLaus asked the Brighton Planning Board for permission to subdivide the 2.6-acre property, creating a one-half acre parcel to sell separately from the main house.

This controversial plan met with spirited opposition from the neighbors. About 80 signed a petition in opposition to the request on the grounds that a smaller separate lot in the area would detract from the character of the neighborhood, which is comprised mainly of large houses or mansions on lots larger than one acre. Barbara DeLaus subsequently withdrew the request and the house was put on the market again as one parcel.



Frank Gannett, age 30, bought the *Elmira Gazette* with Erwin Davenport in 1906. The next year he bought the *Elmira Star*.

The incident called attention to the area and the historic house which is its centerpiece.



Frank Gannett by Karsh, Ottawa.

From 1900 until 1915 architect James Arnold (1881-1957) worked in the office of Claude Bragdon (1866-1944), perhaps the area's best known architect. "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 firehouses. As a partner in Stern, Dailey and Damuth (1932-1938) Herbert Stern designed the Irondequoit Country Club. As a firm, Arnold & Stern was responsible for designing many of the finer residences in the Rochester area as well as St. Augustine's Church, St. Patrick's Church in Victor, libraries for Pittsford and LeRoy, the Harper Sibley Building, the Rochester Zoo and the Academy building for the Sacred Heart Convent.

The Gannett house is important not just architecturally and as a neighborhood anchor, but as the former home of an internationally known figure who founded the Gannett newspapers, now the largest chain of newspapers in the United States. In addition, Frank Gannett established the Gannett Foundation in 1935 (ostensibly to own the newspapers and keep the Roosevelt administration from applying a heavy new corporate tax to them); today it is one of the largest charitable foundations in the country. In 1940 Gannett ran for the Republican nomination for President of the United States (losing to Wendell Wilkie). Later he served as an advisor to Governor Thomas E. Dewey. Gannett also hob-nobbed with many of the major figures in pre-World War II Europe, including Stanley Baldwin (the British Prime Minister who forced Edward VIII to abdicate the throne). He also met with Mussolini, Rudolf Hess and Pope Pius XII.

2

Many notable figures of the day were entertained at 195 Sandringham Road in Brighton, including Prime Minister Anthony Eden, the British publisher Lord Beaverbrook, Prince Otto, the heir to the Austrian throne and his brother Archduke Felix, and Jacques Cartier, the Parisian jewel maker.