A Fable from Former Times

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 to Kodak Office as the setting sun will on his way home. Developers such as Houston Barnard know not to locate suburban sudivisions 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 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 1905 mansion. And Claude Bragdon designed a sweeping verandah for the Country Club of Rochester which masqueraded as a Tudor mansion on property adjacent to 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, is banned, but so is the one-upsmanship 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 which begins (and terminates) in Brighton Village, a small shopping center at Winton Road and East Ave. which the city annexed in 1905, leaving the Town of Brighton without a center. But the subway follows the old Erie Canal bed which veers away from, rather than toward, the downtown shopping area. And to board the subway, our heroine would have to drive to the Winton Road terminal, hardly a prescription for successful mass transit.

There is no such thing as a mall, here in midtown Rochester or anywhere else, yet within two blocks of the parked, unlocked roadster, 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 stew gathers. The stew consists of musicians, professors, stage and opera directors which George Eastman has 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 Eastman, meet here too. There is an electric international spirit to Rochester in 1929, not equaled before or since. To walk into the Corner Club in 1929 is akin to walking into a restaurant in Miami's South Beach in 1995: one is as likely to overhear

French, German, Spanish, Russian, Hungarian, Italian, and so forth spoken as to hear 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 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 woodwork and leaded glass windows abound. Then she skips upstairs to the ceramic tile and chrome bathroom. She experiences 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 revolutionize 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 becaming the criterion, with modernistic architecture eventually nudging out the eclectic historic styles. (One of the fascinating things to me about the Houston Barnard Subdivision 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, 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 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 family we have been following has used the firm of Gordon & Kaelber, which, employing about 40 architects and draftsmen is currently the largest in Rochester. Edwin Gordon was originally a partner of Claude Bragdon in the small firm of Gordon, Bragdon and Orchard, in existence 1891 to 1895. The partners subsisted by entering competitions—for the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh, Copley Square in Boston, a courthouse for Baltimore—reaping petty cash as prize money but never a major commission. They won a $2000 prize for their design for a new city hall for New York City, but had to sue to collect it. The contrast between the partners is instructive. Bragdon called it his "purple cow period...a time when life did not make sense and nothing seemed important." Bragdon was described by a contemporary as "a genius with a child-like enthusiasm for whatever engaged his attention at the moment."

Gordon, having married at 21, was more serious and focused. To make ends meet he taught classes in drawing at the Mechanics Institute four evenings a week. He watched George Eastman's photographic business grow and subsisted happily all one winter on cold potatoes secure in the anticipation that he would one day garner all the Kodak King's architectural commissions. When the partnership broke up so that Bragdon could have a *Wanderjahr* in Europe, Gordon spent the next seven years as J. Foster Warner's draftsman. In 1902, Gordon and William Madden, another employee, asked Warner for partnerships;

Warner agreed to make Gordon a partner but not his friend, so both architects left and the firm of Gordon and Madden was born. It lasted until 1918 when Madden retired; before that, in 1911, the firm took on William G. Kaelber, born in 1886, who became a junior partner and then Gordon's partner in 1918. The firm did garner the Eastman commissions of the Rochester Dental Dispensary and similar clinics in five European capitals, Rochester General Hospital, the University of Rochester River Campus, its School of Medicine and Dentistry and Strong Memorial Hospital, Cutler Union, the Eastman Theatre and School of Music, and additions to Kodak Office.

While neither Edwin Gordon or William Kaelber specialized in residences, several of the architects of the firm did. Thus, while the names of the partners appear on the plans, the actual designer may remain unknown.

Our heroine's neighbor obtained plans from a Boston architect—Benjamin Proctor.

Another neighbor has a house designed by Ward Wellington Ward (1875-1932). Ward was a gifted and prolific Syracuse architect whose "Arts and Crafts" designs for Tudoresque houses dot Brighton, particularly in the Grosvenor-Pelham area.

Ward practiced architecture between 1908 and 1926 and while two-thirds of the 250 or so houses which he designed during that period are found in the Syracuse area, a surprising number (38) were for locations in Brighton, Pittsford, or Rochester. Ward was noted for his large output of pen and watercolor sketches which presented his ideas of "the small house made into art." One of Barnard's enterprising salesman, Irving Hames, used Ward's quick renderings to win commissions for the Syracuse architect. Today, of course, these houses would not be considered "small."

Ward houses eventually built in this area include four on Grosvenor Rd. and six on Pelham Rd. Also attributed are 26 and 39 Sandringham Dr., 30 Trevor Court Rd. There are Ward-designed houses on Douglas Rd., Seneca Pky., San Raphael Dr. and East Ave. in Pittsford.

The Arts and Crafts Movement

Founded in England in the mid-19th century by William Morris, the Arts and Crafts movement was a protest against the perceived poor design that resulted from the Industrial Revolution. Morris proposed a totally designed and hand-crafted environment that looked back to the Middle Ages for inspiration and technique.

Morris and his colleagues, the pre-Raphaelite painters, saw medieval times as a paradise where everything was beautiful but in trying to return to the purity of hand craftsmanship in the face of the machine age, their cause was ultimately doomed. (19th century innovations in technology such as the balloon frame, standardized lumber, and machine-made nails resulted in lighter, cheaper houses. Thus the typical Arts and Crafts house was a product of the Industrial Revolution—no wattle and dung here—with hand detailing.)

The early momentum did generate a stylistic revolution in English and American architecture, however, and the international flourishing of Art Nouveau. This impulse continued to be felt long into the Art Deco and Bauhaus era of the 1920s. International exponents of the Morris principle that the total environment should be a work of art included English architects Philip Webb, Richard Norman Shaw, M. H. Bailie Scott, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the American Frank Lloyd Wright, and a group of California architects.

Among those who continued the tradition were Ward Wellington Ward and among those communities affected well into the 1930s was Brighton. Tudoresque residences are everywhere—not just in the Barnard tract, but in Homeacres, Meadowbrook, Browncroft, and along Clover St. So pervasive was the style that even country clubs, firehouses, and gas stations had to be "Tudor" so as not to disrupt the scale and definition of the residential town of Brighton.

Domestic architecture of the American Arts and Crafts Movement followed the English "cottage" style which made even the largest house appear small. Visual delight and mood were created by careful attention to craftsmanship and the use of indigenous, vernacular sources. It incorporated such features as bay windows, gables, ornamental brick and tile work, stone carving, leaded glass, ceramic mosaics, elaborated chimneys, copper down spouts, carved finials, and finely proportioned brackets, porticos, and balustrades.

An Arts and Crafts house could be based on sources as diverse as the English yeoman's cottage, a New England colonial house, a Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse, the California mission style, or even a Japanese teahouse. Midwest architects, lacking a regional source, developed a style based on the Arts and Crafts-inspired Prairie School of Frank Lloyd Wright. Tudor and New England colonial are the most popular sources for Brighton.

New York State became a center of the Arts and Crafts Movement. In New York City, Louis Comfort Tiffany produced spectacular Art Nouveau pieces. In the Eastwood suburb of Syracuse, Gustav Stickley built his "Mission Oak"

furniture and published *The Craftsman*, bible of the movement, while the Robineaus of Syracuse similarly published *Keramic Studio*. In Aurora, Elbert Hubbard founded The Roycroft community.

In Rochester, architect Harvey Ellis developed a subtle variation of the style, distributing his sensitive renderings through *The Craftsman* and founding, with architect Claude Bragdon, a local Arts and Crafts chapter. Bragdon's own style was broadly based on the 1920s manifestation of the style, sometimes incorporating Art Deco elements.

Ward also designed factories, and apartment buildings as well as extensively remodeling historic houses and their interiors

Ward's work and reputation were almost entirely limited to upstate New York, but his houses bear the characteristics of the international movement and he would draw on many historical sources for a single design. Although this made his houses picturesque and eclectic, he was quite selective and reworked the sources to achieve a very personal style. He constantly consulted his clients and came up with functional plans that spoke to their needs, habits, tastes, and lifestyle. These dictated exterior forms such as the size and placement of windows and doors, but even those elements were placed irregularly, Ward's genius for creating balance without resorting to symmetry prevailed.

Ward achieved the small-house look by various design illusions, notably the use of a low overhanging roof and a minimum of gables and dormers in the front elevation. Because of this, the size of a Ward house and his skill at handling masses is more evident in the rear elevation.

Ward interiors feature built-in details—inglenooks with tiled hearths and fireside benches, breakfast nooks, pantry cupboards, tiled vestibules with motifs that continued in geometric borders along a hall, linen closets of dressers, French doors leading to a sun room or porch, and alcoves and bays which break the four-square symmetry. Leaded glass medallions are found in cabinet doors and windows. Moravian tiles decorate fireplace facings and pavings, and the focus of the living room becomes this handcrafted inglenook, a showplace for built-in crafts.

Ward used the work of craftsmen that thus far have achieved greater reputations than he has. Henry Chapman Mercer (1856-1930), a tilemaker enamored of lost Pennsylvania Dutch pottery processes, founded the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works in Doylestown, PA. in 1898. Storybook tiles are bright colors glazed over parts of the unglazed natural red clay. Ward used more

Moravian tiles than any other architect: more than 200 installations are found in upstate residences.

German-born Henry Keck (1873-1956) was a Tiffany trained glass designer who joined Pike's Stained Glass Studio in Rochester in 1909. Ward started commissioning glassworks from Pike then, and continued with Keck after he opened a studio Syracuse in 1913—primarily to do church windows but with a small "house business" on the side. Keck glass featured bright and opalescent compositions of naturalistic figures, trees, and other details arranged in mosaic patterns and stylized by thick black lead outlines. (In 1920 there were 200 glass studios in the country, an indication of the widespread popularity of the Arts and Crafts tradition.

Other 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.

J. Foster Warner may have designed some of the houses. Warner, age thirty-one, was of the third generation of a family of architects. His father, Andrew Jackson Warner, had designed most of downtown Rochester in the popular nineteenth century Gothic, Romanesque, or Second Empire Revival styles as well as many of the Italianate mansions on East Avenue and a small job for George Washington Eastman in 1850. His great uncles Merwin and Henry Austin, of Rochester and New Haven, Connecticut respectively, were responsible for much of the Greek and Gothic Revival look of a still earlier era in those cities. The younger Warner favored the Colonial, Classical or Georgian Revival styles then sweeping the country and had already designed the Powers Hotel, the "skyscraper" Granite Building, and the Monroe County and Ontario County courthouses in these fashionable modes. Warner was a stickler for high architectural and building standards, had a certain dryness of style, a propensity for bombast, and an autocratic manner which subdued most clients into agreeing with his preferences. His residences include Eastman House, the Soule house, now the office of Asbury Methodist Church, and 1296 East Ave., now the home of Connie and Jim Acquavella.

The 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), 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. For his parents in 1922, Stern designed an English regency house at 2 Argyle Street which is pictured on the cover of the new Landmark Society Book. Herbie Stern also transformed a multi-gabled, verandahed, and shingled Victorian hulk at 10 South Goodman St. into an elegant regency townhouse for Francis and Kathleen McEnery Cunningham. That house is now part of the Rochester Museum and Science Center campus.

As a firm, Arnold & Stern was responsible for designing the house at 2 Buckingham St. (now the home of Jane and Byron Johnson) and a house at 35 Douglas Rd. (now the home of Vee and George Angle), 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.

Leon Stern (1867-1931), Herbie's cousin, designed the three Tudor firehouses in Brighton, back in the days when firehouses and gas stations had to be "Tudor" so as not to disrupt the scale and definition of the residential town of Brighton. He may have done some Houston Barnard houses but in view of the fact that he died in 1931, it seems unlikely.

Probably none of the houses were designed by Claude Bragdon, although he did a garage for Houston Barnard at 7 Strathallan Park in 1914, a house for Junius Judson at 5 Highland Heights in Brighton in 1912, a house for Nathan Soble at 2300 East Ave in 1910, a garden and loggia for George Eastman in 1917, a Tudor house at 1171 Clover St. (date unknown), and the Country Club of Rochester (now demolished) in 1903. Bragdon left architecture and Rochester in 1922, moving to New York and taking up a new career as a stage designer.

In 1936 F. Ritter Shumway employed Howard L. Stone to prepare plans for his house at 375 Ambassador Drive. Stone, who was born in Clifton Springs in 1898 and graduated the University of Pennsylvania. In 1920 he entered the office of Gordon & Kaelber and in 1935 he opened his own office on Faraday Street. Most of his work was in the residential field, such as a brick Georgian Revival house at 45 Corning Park, Webster, which he designed in 1930. Thus, plans labeled Gordon & Kaelber and dated between 1920 and 1935 could be Stone designs. Stone also designed the Todd Mart shopping center and did work for Frazier (Meadowbrook) and Sanford Abbey.

Walter V. Wiard, who lived at 65 Trevor Court from 1957 until he moved to New Mexico in 1978, was the architect of one and perhaps more residence, address unknown. Wiard was born in East Avon in 1899 and graduated from the University of Rochester. In 1922 he entered the office of Storrs Barrows and in 1930 formed the partnership of Wiard and Martin with Henry Martin which was dissolved during World War II but surfaced from 1948 to 1957 as Martin, McGraw & Wiard. In 1964 he formed the firm of Wiard and Burwell with William O. Burwell. He retired in 1973. The mainstay account of the firms with which Wiard was associated was Taylor Wine. Since 1930, Wiard firms completed more than 40 buildings for Taylor. Other commercial and industrial clients include R.T.French, R.G.& E., Eastman Kodak, Hickey Freeman, Alling & Cory, American Airlines, Scrantom's, and Singer.

In 1938 Wiard designed the house at 3500 Elmwood Ave. for Kenneth Keating, another East Avon native. A substantial pile of brick with three-car garage, circular staircase, three master baths three maids' rooms, and cupboards for four sets of ancestral china, the Keating abode was built in the depths of the Depressions fro $36,500. During construction, the mistress of the house summoned the architect daily with a list a changes and the query: "Will you see that these are done or shall I call my lawyer?"

One of Wiard's commissions for the Ambassador-Sandringham area was for a house that included a timid soul. An exterior column had to go, Wiard recalled, "for fear that some might jump out from behind it." The upstairs bedrooms were all interconnected so in case the house was burglarized, the family could flee without entering the hall and encountering the intruder. Ironically, three weeks after the house was occupied, an intruder put ladder to window and entered while everyone slept soundly until morning.

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 Siegmond 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 a number of homes in the Houston Barnard Subdivision.

It seems likely that C. Storrs Barrows designed some of the houses. Barrows, a native of Springfield Mass., was born in 1889. He trained at the University of Rochester and in the office of Charles Hirschfelder. He practiced alone from 1911 until 1945, except for 1921-1923 when he formed a partnership with Roland Westbrook. Barrows designed many distinctive custom homes during these years including one on Bellevue Drive and one at 111 Grosvenor Rd. for Dr. Shirley Snow Sr. With various partners after 1945 he designed Penfield High School and elementary schools on Atlantic Ave. and Baird Rd., East Rochester High School, Brighton Town Hall, four city firehouses, several churches, and the Methodist Home and other facilities for senior citizens.

Probably none of the houses in the Houston Barnard Subdivision were built from mail order plans—as was Richard Nixon's birthplace and a host of other more modest American houses.

5. Houston Barnard Tract

Houston Barnard was a civil engineer and realtor who laid out Grosvenor and Pelham Roads in Brighton. By 1924 Pelham Road had 11 houses. Tudor and Colonial Revival styles predominate. Twelve of the residences are by the Syracuse architect, Ward Wellington Ward. Following the demise of the American elm tree on these streets, linden and maple trees have been planted.

Less than a mile away, off East Avenue, one of the most ambitious and elaborate developments in the East was envisioned by the developers of the Houston Barnard Tract—Sandringham Road, Esplanade Drive, Ambassador Road. Spacious homes built here did not save the venture from becoming one of the town's most sppectacular financial failures. Expensive roads with sidewalks and streetlamps but bare of homes was a bizarre feature of Brighton until the post-World War II building boom finally filled in the missing spaces.