

HOUSTON BARNARD, His Life and Legacy

By Arlene Vanderlinde

Houston Barnard, engineer, businessman, developer, yachtsman was born in Rochester in 1871. He was the son of William C., who came to Rochester from Acworth, New Hampshire and Elvira Houston Barnard, whose family owned a tavern on Ridge Road which was the first stage stop between Rochester and Lewiston. Her father was also a prominent area politician.

Houston's father was a famous 49er of the California gold rush and one of the few who was successful. The elder Barnard returned to Rochester in 1855 and lived a leisurely life until his death in 1907, at the age of 82. Elvira died in 1888, when Houston was 17.

Houston graduated from the Rochester Free Academy in 1889 and went on to study civil engineering in various local offices, the Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh Railroad and with engineer, LeGrand 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. He also laid out the Summerville Railway line and boulevard. He was New York State's Assistant Superintendent of Public Works, in charge of the western portion of the state during the administrations of Governors Theodore Roosevelt, Odell and Higgins.

He was the general contractor for the Cobbs Hill reservoir between 1908 and 1911, the Utica and Tonawanda improvement of the New York Central Railroad and had several contracts for the construction of the Barge Canal.

As a yachtsman in Lake Ontario and the Thousand Islands, he donated his cruiser, *Qui Vivre* (or *Qui Vive*) to the U.S. government at the beginning of World War I. *Qui Vivre* served as a dispatch boat for the American fleet. The government honored him with a bronze plaque.

As early as 1895, Houston Barnard became identified with the physical growth of Rochester. He laid out several streets and tracts in the city and beyond. Some of these were held in the name of his wife, Katherine. Believing that the future of the community belonged in the areas beyond the Rochester city line, he formed the Barnard Development Co., with offices in the Powers Building. He also had an office at the corner of East Avenue and Grosvenor Road in Brighton, and began developing, in the words of his advertisements "important real estate enterprises of high character and residential purposes." About 1918 he acquired two parcels of land in Brighton: one bound by Gould Street and what came to be known as Council Rock Avenue to the west and east, and by Highland and East Avenue to the south and north. This came to be the Houston Barnard Subdivision. His other parcel, known as the Houston Barnard Tract, extended from Clover Street to Elmwood and East Avenues.

The second parcel took part of the A. Emerson Babcock farm (The 1829 farmhouse, known as the Moore-Babcock-Harris House still standing at 1496 Clover Street. It was a stop on the Underground Railroad and is now a designated Brighton Landmark). Emerson Babcock was the Brighton Town Supervisor from 1892-1931. Nurseryman, Edward Harris and his family lived in the house for many years. There were fruit orchards and a kiln on the property which Barnard removed to make way for his development. By the time the 1918 Plat Book had been published, he had laid out curving roads with curbs, installed street lamps and sidewalks, even before the first house was built. The roads ran off Clover Road (now Clover Street) and what was then called Morris Drive and Cornelia Street and were part of Abraham Nellis Tract. At first naming the streets Orchard Road and Cherry Road, reflecting the nurseries in the area, Barnard soon decided to adopt the Anglo-inspired names we see today. Their British connotations may indicate that he was aware of the Anglo-American inspiration of the planned garden suburb which thrived from the 4th quarter of the 19th century to about 1940. Orchard Road became Ambassador Drive, with lots of at least 100-foot frontages. Cherry Road became Sandringham Road with mandated frontages of 100-feet on the south side and 75 feet on the north side. Cornelia Street, which was became Georgian Court. There were other specifications put in place by Barnard: only one structure per lot was allowed with no more than one outbuilding; no front porches; minimum distance from a neighboring property; homes must have a minimum value; all houses must be two-and-a-half stories. This last one insures that the roofs lines in the neighborhood are consistent. These rules were followed until Barnard's death in 1936, but not beyond.

By 1930 there were 21 houses on the new Grosvenor Road and 15 on the new Pelham Road. By comparison, there were only had 12 houses on Sandringham Road and 6 houses on Trevor Court.

Because of two periods of economic distress worldwide, the recession of 1920-21 and the Great Depression beginning in 1929 with the Stock Market crash, Houston Barnard endured severe economic losses. He had expended much of his money in the infrastructure of his property and had to wait for the lots to be sold so he could recoup his investment. At one point in his life, he was worth over \$5 million. In 1935, he endured a bankruptcy and at the time of his death in 1936, his estate was worth a mere \$2000.

Houston Barnard died of an apparent heart attack at the age of 65 while visiting Nice, France. He left two daughters, who lived in New York City, and four unmarried sisters, who lived together at 20 Calumet Street. His lifetime residences included 7 Strathallan Park (1918), the Powers Hotel, 68 Avondale Park and Reynolds Street.

In addition to his presidency of the Barnard Development Company, Houston Barnard was a Mason, a member of the Genesee Valley Club, The Rochester Club, and the Thousand Islands Yacht Club at the time of his death.

One of the fascinating things about the Houston Barnard Subdivision is that because lot sales and construction were so slow, the area exhibits a great variety of architectural trends and styles that were popular between 1920 and 1980. The original architecture of the Houston Barnard Subdivision could be called “Eclectic”. The Eclectic style implemented all aspects of historic style, including scale, proportions, massing, colors, and textures. Good materials and fine craftsmanship were part of the equation. The mass immigration during the 1920s of Italian master craftsmen trained through the apprentice program reinforced this (Barnard, himself, was trained through this system as were many engineers and architects at this time). Without this system in place in this country, there would be no subsequent generations of craftsmen.

The architects who employed these principles felt free to interpret and edit the details of the past. One finds the influence of Tudor, Mediterranean, Colonial and Gothic Revival styles, but with a fresh approach, bringing each new home a fresh style. Barnard didn't have just one architect at work on all the properties, nor did he insist on certain ones for his clients. They brought in their own from an impressive list of local and regional talent. Some of the architects represented in the Houston Barnard Subdivision are: James B. Arnold, Herbert Stern, Ward Wellington Ward (Syracuse), Carl Traver, C. Storrs Barrows, Howard L. Stone, Gordon & Kaelber, Edgar Phillips, Thomas Boyde. Can you add to this list?

Few developers had such influence on the outcome of their property. You, as residents benefit from the high level of care and quality insisted upon by Houston Barnard. Through the years, changes have been made, some appropriate and some not. Now it is up to the homeowners to maintain the vision of the man who made quality a household word.