

## Brighton Area Historical Society - Power Comes To Brighton

Written by Marieanna Bair  
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Beginning in 1835, many with the surname of Power(s) began making the journey from the east, mainly New York, to buy and settle land in Michigan. Among them was Robert D. Power and wife, Aleta. They built and operated the first public house in Brighton on Grand River at the southeast corner of the Trail and what would later be named Spencer Road, in 1836. The structure was considered as “. . . one of the first steps taken toward giving the place the character of a village.” It was probably built of lumber – the Maltby Mill within a mile. By 1843, the public house was sold to B.P. Vealy.

Robert is described as a forceful man and is credited with an ‘intuitive shrewdness’. He had an aptness for politics and was reputed as being instrumental in persuading his neighbors in his direction. By 1838, he was elected to serve as county sheriff to which position he dedicated himself until being elected to the Michigan 9th Legislature in 1844. Voters later elected him as director of the Brighton School District in 1851. In addition, land transaction records note a long list of his purchases and sales of properties in the village and surrounding townships.

Robert, born 1801, and Aleta, b. 1817, had three children after arriving in Brighton. Robert died March 24, 1861. William was born in 1836, Georgia-1839, and Harriet, born May 3, 1854, who died on her 14th birthday in 1868. Georgia married George C. Tomlinson. Their daughter Florida, born in 1855, spent considerable time with her grandmother, Aleta, being counted at her residence in the 1870 census. At this time Aleta is living in town taking in lodgers, one of who is Dr. Ira Bingham (brother of Gov. Kinsley Bingham). Aleta died in 1905.

William lived in Brighton most of his life serving as Master of the Brighton Masonic Lodge in 1878-80 and 1882-1900. He was Justice of the Peace beginning in 1875 and through 1906. He did a bit of traveling- in Central City, Colorado in 1867 and in Bay City, Michigan, 1871. Altho’ he’d married he was divorced and lived with his mother. His obituary, he died March 5, 1907, describes him as a loving son caring for his mother.

Robert, Aleta, William and Harriet are resting in the Old Village Cemetery by the mill pond. Other Powers, arriving at that early time, took up land in Deerfield, Hamburg, Marion, Oeola and Tyrone townships. Trees were felled, ground broken, homes built and families grew.

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*Compiled by Marieanna Bair from writings of William Pless; census records, the 1880 History of Livingston County; Early Land Owners and Settlers, and obituaries copied by Milton Charboneau.*