

THE WESTERN HOUSE

Further research will be necessary to determine who built the Western House Hotel, Livery and Carriage Barn in 1873. In 1879, P. D. Skillbeck owned the building and R. M. Filmore was the proprietor.

Prior to the arrival of the railroad to Brighton in 1871, travelers had arrived by stage coach on the planked toll road called the Grand River Road, and had stayed at Ben Cushing's Brighton Hotel (later the Eastern House) on the north east corner of Grand River Road and Main Street. Situated approximately half way between Detroit and Lansing, Brighton became a popular stop for rest and refreshment.

The arrival of the railroad signaled a decline in stage coach travel. Salesmen and agents calling on local merchants used the railroad for transportation. Those villages and crossroads stores not serviced by the railroad made it necessary to rent a livery rig to deliver products and take orders.

A lively competition soon developed between the Western House Hotel and Ben Cushing's Brighton Hotel. Both kept horses and rigs to supply and cater to the travelers' needs.

At the turn of the century, LeRoy King, "the man in shirtsleeves" was the proprietor of the Western House. He met each passenger train coatless in his attempts to "buttonhole" or persuade travelers to select his hotel as the place to stay. The finest foods and liquors were served, each room had a window, beds were clean and comfortable and there was room for elegant parties and banquets.

The horses in his stable, he boasted, were spirited, yet gentle and his rigs among the most stylish. A place where good friends met to become better friends; it was the center of community social activity.

The hotel business was doing well until the early 1900s when the horseless carriage came into common use. More miles could be covered in a day and overnight hotel accommodations were less in demand. The salesmen didn't need Mr. King's rigs to visit the isolated crossroads stores and villages. Local residents often traveled out of town for recreation instead of spending their free time at the Western Hotel. To add the final blow, the county went dry and bootleggers, blind-pigs and saloons in adjacent, wet counties acquired that part of the hotel's business.

Howard Hunter, Nathan Caverly and Ed Standlick were local people who also ran the business but with little success. Since the repeal of the 18th amendment various owners have modernized the building and operate it as a rooming house and a bar. (Above condensed from "A Scrapbook of Michigan Memorabilia" by William Pless.)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 481  
BRIGHTON, MI. 48116