

EARLY GRISTMILLS OF THE BRIGHTON AREA

The advent of gristmills eliminated the tedious hand grinding of grain which had been necessary to have flour, or the labor and expense of several day's travel to bring it from Detroit or Ann Arbor. Today it is difficult to decide which cake mix or which of dozens of types of bread to select. Following the cutting of trees the now open fields were planted to corn, wheat, rye, oats, barley, etc. During the 1830s several gristmills were built in the area.

Altho' the village was centered, in 1840, on the hill where Spencer Road and Rickett Road intersect the Grand River Trail, "Upper Town", Orson Quackenbush selected vacant land in "Lower Town" to build the Brighton Flouring and Gristmill. The site was located on the north side of W. North Street; a strip about two blocks wide extending north (on the west side of S. West Street). The parcel included the area to be flooded by the millpond, and the high ground now occupied by the Old Town Hall, St. Paul's Episcopal Church and the village cemetery. After securing the plot, water rights also had to be obtained before building the dam. In those days this mill saved farmers a long trip to Woodruff's Mill on Pleasant Valley Road.

Altho' presently the city parking lot, the location was low and marshy ground. Moving dirt with a small slip scraper with one h.p. to construct the dam and spillway and form the raceway ponds north of the mill required considerable time. (It seems likely the lumber for the mill was cut by the Maltby Sawmill just a few hundred feet down stream.) During the years of the mill's operation there were two bridges on W. North Street; one over the stream from the water that turned the water wheel, the other over the water from the spillway. The dam was built on the south side of Main Street.

Quackenbush operated his mill for a few months and then sold the mill, including all the property and rights to Rev. Wm. A. Clark. He died in September, 1841, and his heirs sold the mill back to Quackenbush. However, the Clarks donated the high ground east of the mill pond as a future site for the Episcopal Church and the Village received the land where the cemetery and the Old Town Hall are now located.

In 1847, Quackenbush sold the mill to Evert Woodruff who, in 1849, sold the Brighton Mill to Lyman Judson, who owned a large farm on Grand River Road, just east of the village limits. Judson enlarged the mill, removed the old breast water wheel and installed a French turbine type of water wheel. In 1856, he sold the mill to Egbert F. Albright and Chester Thomson. (Compiled and edited by Marieanna Bair from: "Michigan Memorabilia" by William Pless, 1880 History of Livingston County. Corrections and/or additions to this or any other subjects of local history are most welcome by this writer.) "Early Gristmills" to be continued next issue.

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