

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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IN SEARCH OF THE BLUE LANTERN CASINO

In 1920 this country moved from a culture where the majority of the people lived in rural/small town settings to over half the people living in urban areas. The player piano as home entertainment would soon be replaced by the gramophone. At about this time radio connected the entire country to the music of the big city hotel ballrooms, and movies would expose the masses to the popular music, dance, and drama of the day. The Detroit based automobile industry produced affordable cars which allowed families the freedom of day trips to explore various arts and entertainment venues, and to vacation where recreation activities were plentiful. The Brighton area, with all its lakes, became just the place for a city dweller to have a summer cottage.

The picturesque terrain of the southeastern sector of Livingston County from the early days was attractive as a recreation region. Quality bathing beaches, boating facilities, fishing sites, picnic areas, and camp grounds still serve people today. In addition we now have golf courses, a ski facility, the Millpond Boardwalk, the Gazebo and Imagination Station, Meijer Skate Park, Farmers Market, the Brighton Center for the Performing Arts, State and Metro Park facilities, school nature and recreation sites, along with a host of local business specialty shops and entertainment fare. There are many restaurants with outstanding cuisine which all enhance the recreation and entertainment scene in the area.

About 1921 the Blue Lantern Casino was erected on the shore of Island Lake, Green Oak Township, near Brighton. The large well constructed dance floor was built partly over the lake, and cottage residents who attended events moored their rowboats in the open area beneath it. The exterior was white stucco with blue trim. It was arguably the premier summer entertainment spot outside of Detroit. Tourists and locals danced to the music of the touring big name bands: Casa Loma, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Red Nichols, Abe Lyman, Benny Goodman, Wayne King, Bob Crosby, and the Dorsey Brothers to name a few. Jean Goldkette, a pianist, bandleader, and manager of the Greystone Ballroom in Detroit, was instrumental as a booking agent who brought quality dance bands to the Blue Lantern.

It was a hot night spot particularly during prohibition. Celebrities like Babe Ruth, Governor Groesbeck, and others frequented the lake hotels and the Blue Lantern. Locals tell us that the Purple Gang, out of Detroit, had a place in the vicinity. The Blue Lantern continued as an entertainment site until heavily damaged by fire. It was torn down in 1964. The fieldstone pillars on Grand River Avenue near the VFW Hall are all that remain today, but the romance and the engaging stories of the early jazz era through the fifties continue to this day. It is always gratifying for a community to connect with its heritage. The Blue Lantern becomes a metaphor, and gives added meaning to the arts and culture of the Brighton area today.

It is the hope of the Livingston Arts & Culture Consortium that pictures, ads, and more information about the Blue Lantern Casino can be found. Please contact Marieanna Bair at 229-6402 if you have anything to share in the search for the history of the Blue Lantern.

Submitted by Joyce Powers, Livingston Arts & Culture Consortium
Brighton Your Life - Celebrate the Arts