

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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WILLIAM R. COBB, AN EARLY BRIGHTON MERCHANT

William R. Cobb, whose father was from England and his mother, Ireland, was born in Vermont in 1820. By 1837, he was married to 15-year-old Lucy E. That year, son, Realdes was born to be followed by Charles L. in 1838. Realdes lived to the age of five, his younger brother died when eight years old. Both are memorialized with markers in the Old Village Cemetery. The family arrived in Brighton in 1838, and immediately set to work building a store in 'Upper Town' on the west side of Grand River, next to Truman Worden's home, north of Hamburg Road (it would be c. 80 years before Brighton Lake was formed). The growing community was in need of a general store. It is probable the family lived on that site, at least for a time. Cobb's trade is listed as a mason.

A building on the east side of Grand River Trail, between Fitch (Main) Street and North Street, in 'Lower Town' was moved and in its place John D. Appleton had built a three-story, two-store wide building by 1839. Used as a hotel, it became known as the Appleton Block. Not much later, it became the W.R. Cobb and Company Store. He was one of four merchants in 1843. The 1863 Brighton Business/professional 'list' includes him also. Dr. William McHench purchased an interest in the building c. 1850, and it became the Cobb & McHench Block. A fire, May 1934, damaged the c. 85-year-old building, and it was demolished. Shortly two two-story stores were built, which are still in place.

Cobb recognized his responsibility to the community; when the village area was part of Brighton Township, he served as clerk, 1845. When the Village was organized, 1867, he served as trustee in 1869 and 1874 and as assessor, 1869. He also participated in county government in a variety of positions: judge in 1849, clerk, 1862, coroner, 1877/79. The first Brighton Fair had his services as Chief Marshall. The local school system also benefited; he was on the board in 1867-68 when the Union School plans were formulated. He was a steward in the Masonic Lodge in 1879. Although not Catholic, he (among others) donated generously to the construction of the first Catholic Church on the Ann Arbor Road (Rickett Road).

The Cobb's home was on the north side of Mill Street (St. Paul's) between Grand River and East Street. The 1875 map of the village indicates W.R. owned four blocks just north of their home and 24 acres east. He and Lucy had five more children: Ellen 1850, May E. 1852, William R. Jr. 1855, Charles H. 1858 and Elmer 1862. In 1882, a grandchild fell into a cistern and drowned. Lucy died June 1, 1879, William August 7, 1882, Grandson, Harry, was the last in Brighton to bear the Cobb name. He died in 1971. Some of the children are buried in Fairview Cemetery. (Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: 1880 History of Livingston County; from Settlement to city - Brighton, Michigan - 1832-1945; William Pless' Village Cemetery Supplement; censuses; obituaries compiled by Milton Charboneau. Additions and corrections requested. 810/229-6402.)