

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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OF THREE SETTLERS NAMED GAY

Washington Gay, b. 1805, New York; Edward F. Gay, b. 1800, Connecticut; and Ralph Gay, b. 1785, Connecticut. (The possibility exists they were brothers or cousins.) All were residents of the area by the mid 18th century. They brought talents to the wilderness - ranging from merchandising to masonry, to political acumen, to audacious entrepreneurship.

In 1850, Washington Gay was living in the newly built Brighton House (S.W. corner of Main Street and the Grand River Trail). He was a mason. An Erastus Gay, born 1831 in New York, was at that same location at the time. The family connection has not been determined. The 1859 atlas of Brighton Township shows a V.W. Gay as owner of the N½ of the NW¼, 80 acres in Section 22 (east of Van Amberg and Skeman Roads), with what appears to be a structure on the property. By 1895, Thomas Graham, husband of Alida Gay, daughter of Ralph Gay, is owner of those 80 acres.

Edward F. Gay settled in Ann Arbor in 1831, where he was a merchant. He married Clarissa L., b. 1798 in Connecticut. They had seven children; three girls and four boys. Three of the boys and one of the girls died as children. By April 1837, he'd moved his mercantile business to Howell. Son, Mylo Lee Gay, b. June 20, 1825, in Connecticut became a dealer in land in Livingston County. As an attorney, he was very active in politics and the community. He served as State Representative in 1869 and as Senator in 1870. He was a charter member of the Livingston County Pioneer Association, as was his father who helped draft its constitution, July 4, 1871. In an address to that Society in 1872, Edward told of settling in Ann Arbor and of coming to Livingston Center (Howell) on horseback in 1836. After getting lost on the way to Ore Creek Settlement (Brighton), he finally arrived at Ben Cushing's log tavern (s.e. corner Grand River Trail and Spencer Road). The next morning, he passed 'Uncle' Robert Bigham's log tavern, located about a mile north of town (just south of Challis Road). A few miles farther, he came upon Thomas Pinckney's log house (near Euler Road, the first house in Genoa Township). A bit farther west was Lucious Peet's log tavern (near Kellogg Road). Edward was still seven miles from Livingston Center and felt he was "doomed to wander on the trail, through and among brush and trees and didn't see another building until finally seeing a light in Moses Thompson's log house near the lake that bears his name." This description gives a vivid portrayal of the migrant's struggle of that time. It appears his efforts were worthwhile; he again followed the merchandising trade and did well. By 1845, he built the Temperance House Hotel in 'Livingston Center'.

Ralph Gay and wife, Rachael, b. 1798 in Massachusetts, settled in Brighton Township by 1848, recording in Section 19, SE¼ of the NE¼, NE¼ of the NW¼; and the W½ of the SE¼. In Section 20, the SW¼ of the NW¼, and in Section 22 the NE¼ and NW¼. Most of this property is under Woodland Lake at the present. Their home was on the north side of Hilton Road, just east of Flint Road (demolished in recent years). All four of their children were born in New York, coming with their parents over the Erie Canal. Their oldest son, Victory Richard, b. 1820, married Amanda Eliza c. 1847. V. Richard's son, Victory Steven, was born in 1859. Although handicapped, he operated a butter, egg and veal calf business at W. O. Lee's building on Main Street in Brighton. V. Steven's baby sister, Myrta, was 14 years his junior. Myrta married Clayton A. Grinnell on June 6, 1904, of Grinnell Piano builder fame. Her older sister, Nancy, b. November 1, 1849, was living in town in August 1921, when a news release included "Miss Nancy Gay's house, both interior and exterior is being repaired and improved ... a modern home with a neat new fireplace." Nancy appears to have been quite close to Myrta. In February 1909, she "... went to Detroit to look after Mr. & Mrs. C. A. Grinnell's home during their absence on an extended tour through South America." She occasionally spent winters in Detroit, perhaps with Myrta. Myrta owned the Western House Hotel at the time of her death, July 2, 1929, in Chicago. Her will donates the structure and site to the people of Brighton "for park purposes or for the erection of a Community House to be held and used in the memory of the Gay family." (Compiled by Marieanna Bair from William Pless' writings; census records; 1850-1900 History of Livingston County; Land Owners and Settlers in Livingston County, and obituaries compiled by Milton Charboneau. Additions/corrections requested. 810/229-6402.)