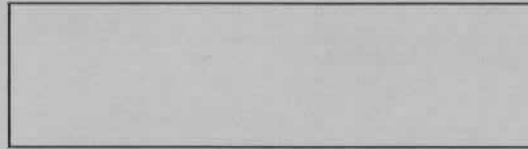


BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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400 WEST MAIN STREET

The 1915 map of Brighton village indicates an A.C. Stewart elevator on the west side of the railroad tracks, across from the depot. Why would one find an elevator in such a location? In 2008 parlance an elevator moves between floors of a multi-story building. In 1915, an elevator also moved items between floors; beans and grains raised by area farmers and brought to the elevator for shipment to market.

Stewart's elevator stood on land leased from the railroad. It was probably built by Henry Hartman after he had served as sheriff of Livingston County during the Civil War and retired from the farm he had cleared in pioneer days. Hartman operated the elevator for several years before Stewart took over. (Stewart, whose ancestors arrived in the area in the mid 19th century, had previously operated a mill a half mile north of Chilson on a stream which drained south out of Crooked Lake.) Farmers drove their full wagons up a dirt ramp next to the elevator and spilled the grain into a chute. From there it was elevated through a fanning mill and screened. It next went up into a large hopper on scales, and into the upper area of the building. The grain could then be directed to flow by gravity to waiting railroad cars for shipment. A horse-driven mechanism supplied the elevating power before the advent of the gasoline engine.

Beans from the farmer's wagon flowed by gravity to a fabric belt and from there to a long balcony at the rear of the building where several women worked picking out the discolored beans and foreign material. Their pay was based on the weight of the material picked out. Not a large income but it was believed they enjoyed the conversations and exchanged gossip while working.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, during harvest and threshing time, wagons delivering grain lined the streets waiting their turn at Stewart's, or the Hyne, elevator on the south side of Main Street. Again, after beans were threshed, the same scenario. Along the side track south of the Stewart elevator, during the apple and potato harvest, farmers unloaded produce directly into freight cars. The economy of the entire area was completely dependent on the 'outside money' farmers received for grain, beans, potatoes, wool, livestock, fruit and dairy products.

Albert Chauncey Stewart operated the elevator and a coal yard until he moved downtown to 400 west Main Street in 1925, where a mill was constructed. Following his move, the old elevator was next operated by the Brighton Farmers' Coop; when they failed, the elevator was torn down. A fire, December 1941, destroyed a number of buildings west of Stewart's. It was extinguished just short of the Coal, Flour and Feed Store.

When area farmers turned to beef and dairy farming, they still raised their own grain. A dump truck, full of corn or other grain, could often be seen well into the 30s and 40s, driving west to First Street, and down the alley to pour grain into a hole along the alley behind Stewart's. Strong, shiny (from the abrasion of the grain) bars placed 4" apart kept children and dogs from falling in. When the grinding equipment was started, the entire building rumbled. Ground grain flowed down chutes into bags hung at the end. A sturdy worker flipped the shut-off lever, gave the cloth bag a shake and tied it with the piece of twine he'd held in his teeth. Then attached the next bag, flipped the lever, and it too was soon full. Often the farmer took the ground grain home, but just as often some might be left to pay for the grinding.

In the mid 1950s, the business became Birdsong's Feed and Seed until he moved across Main Street. A number of entrepreneurs took advantage of the country quaintness of the old mill with its grinding equipment still intact. Among them were 'country' stores, ice cream parlors, restaurants and, most recently, Brighton Bar and Grill.

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from Historic Resource Survey; 'From Settlement to City, Brighton, Michigan, 1832-1945' and writings of Bill Pless. Additions/corrections requested - 810/229-6402.)