

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 481
Brighton, MI 48116-0481

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The Western House

Early references to the Rounsifer family provide varying dates as to the construction of the Western House in Brighton. It may be assumed Asa Rounsifer and wife Hulda came to Michigan in the late 1860s. He had been in the hotel business in the east. The Detroit, Lansing and Northern railroad arrived in Brighton in 1871. Rounsifer bought four lots just east of the tracks, north of West Main. There he built the hotel, Western House, in the Smith-McPherson Addition. However, by 1873 his financial condition caused the sale of the hotel, stables, etc.

Prior to 1871, travelers arrived by stage coach on the planked toll road, the Grand River Road. Located approximately half way between Detroit and Lansing, Brighton had become a popular stop for rest and refreshment, and Ben Cushing’s Brighton Hotel (later the Eastern House) was on the northeast corner of Grand River Road and Main Street.

The arrival of the railroad signaled a decline in stage coach travel. Salesmen and agents calling on local merchants used the railroad for transportation. Those villages and crossroad stores not serviced by the railroad made it necessary to rent a livery rig to deliver products and take orders. A lively competition soon developed between the two hotels. Both kept horses and rigs to supply and cater to the travelers’ needs.

At the turn of the century, LeRoy King, “the man in short sleeves” was the proprietor of the Western House. He met each passenger train coatless in his attempts to ‘buttonhole’ or persuade travelers to select his hotel as the place to stay. The finest foods and liquors were served, each room had a window, beds were clean and comfortable and there was room for elegant parties and banquets. The horses in his stable, he boast-

ed, were spirited yet gentle and his rigs among the most stylish.

The hotel business was doing well until the early 1900s when the horseless carriage came into common use. More miles could be covered in a day and overnight hotel accommodations were less in demand. The salesmen didn’t need Mr. King’s rigs. Local residents often traveled out of town for recreation instead of spending their free time at the Western Hotel. To add the final blow, the county went dry and bootleggers, blind pigs and saloons in adjacent, wet counties acquired that part of the hotel’s business. Since the repeal of the 18th Amendment, various owners have modernized the building and operated it as a rooming house and a bar.

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from Bill Pless writings, newspaper clippings and Rounsifer genealogy. Additions/corrections requested call 810-229-6402.)

Society member, Sheryl James, “Pulitzer Prize winning journalist” has written “Michigan Legends” Folktales and Lore from the Great Lakes State. www.press.umich.edu

Archaeology Day:

At the Michigan Historical Center in Lansing on Saturday October 12 from 11:00 am—3:00 pm. Parking, admission to the museum, and the event are all free. Tim Bennett will have a large display of artifacts from The Warner farm in Brighton Twp. There will be other once-a-year displays from archaeologists from around the state. For information check out https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-54463_18595_18596-283662--,00.html