

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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FROM THE WILDERNESS—BRIGHTON Part 4

The blacksmiths, masons, carpenters and physician living in Benjamin Cushing's hotel in Brighton, c. 1850, were all dependent on passable roads to engage in their livelihoods. However, within ten years the wood planks, of which the Grand River Trail was built, were rotting and travelers found the going difficult. By 1870, plank road companies could not keep up with the warped and deteriorated condition of the plank roads. Gravel road companies came into being.

Native Bill Pless writes "...Not a very good gravel road, but just good enough for an excuse to charge toll. The stagecoaches had been discontinued when the railroad was built (1871), and farmers no longer had to haul their products a great distance to markets in Detroit and Lansing, so the road (Grand River Trail) was now used for local travel. The people soon put up a strong objection to paying toll, and when the gravel road franchise ran out, it was not renewed."

This main cross-state road became a local responsibility for maintenance in addition to the local rural roads. This was accomplished by dividing the townships into 'road districts' under the direction of an elected pathmaster. In early spring the pathmaster 'called-out' the local farmers with their wagons, graders, teams, plows, drags, shovels, picks, etc. Gravel or dirt was hauled into low places, ditches were plowed along the road side and drains for water were shoveled. Farmers were also 'called-out' after severe storms washed out the roadbed or if trees were blown down. Non tax paying men over twenty-one had to give a day's work or pay a dollar. Tax payers who couldn't supply labor or equipment also paid their road tax with cash.

Right-of-way for roads was not provided for in the initial federal government surveys. Roads were usually laid out along property lines. A road three rods wide (49-1/2 feet) took half the width from each farmer's line. If detours were necessary because of terrain or water, the farmer gave the full three rods. Real estate taxes still include property to the middle of the road. Many farmers took personal pride in

keeping his share of the road looking good by fencing, removing obnoxious weeds and brush, and planting shade trees to shade travelers.

Not only were graded rural roads necessary for travel and commerce, Brighton Village also faced the dilemma of providing village residents accessible routes. All streets, business and residential, were the responsibility of the Village, i.e. dirt streets.

The dam on Ore Creek, built by Orson Quackenbush to power his grist mill, resulted in the formation of the Millpond. Streams usually run through wet, swampy areas — Ore Creek was no exception.

Prior to the construction of the railroad and the platting of the Smith-McPherson Addition (land west of Ore Creek to Seventh Street), farmers, peddlers, drovers, etc., from the Genoa Township area forded the stream in wagons or buggies to reach the commercial and business portion of Brighton at Grand River and Fitch Street (Main Street). To amend this difficulty, a bridge was necessary. A trestle bridge was erected, c. 1873, and land west of the stream and north of Main Street was soon filled in. The possibility exists that the Smith-McPherson Addition developers helped with this in order to make their lots more desirable.

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from Bill Pless writings; "From Settlement to City" by Carol McMacken ; Sanborn Maps and Census records.)

Additions/corrections requested. 810-229-6402