

**BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**BRIGHTON’S TRUCK MANUFACTURING PLANT**

Visible at the railroad tracks on Main Street is a white building labeled “Refrigeration Research.” It is a local, successful company today. But the building this company occupies was built in 1920 and 1921 specifically for Brighton’s first, and last, automobile manufacturing company.

In the late teens and 1920s, dozens of automobile manufacturers existed, all trying to reach dominance, much as the early computer companies did in the 1990s. One of these ambitious manufacturers was the Gove Motor Car Company.

According to early Brighton newspaper articles, advertisements and old Gove company newsletters, the Gove company owners – H.E Gove, and D.H. Gove, president and vice president respectively -- first approached the Brighton Board of Commerce Sept. 3, 1920. Representatives from the company which were initiating plants or had operations in Muskegon and in Reno, Nevada, pointed to evidence that the market for autos and trucks was booming after a tough economic year in 1920. In October, it brought a 2-ton Gove truck for display.

Brighton leaders jumped at the chance to get in on the era’s biggest industry, and gamble, and by Sept. 28<sup>th</sup> approved funds and support for the erection of a new factory located at the prime spot along the railroad near Brighton’s business district. The 220-by-80 foot building soon arose on the property.

Meanwhile, Gove started selling stock in the company. A Nov. 3, 1920 ad in the local newspaper read: “Gove Motor Car Company, Brighton, Michigan, Manufacturers of Trucks and Pleasure Cars, Phone 31.”

The prospect of having an auto/truck manufacturing facility in

Brighton was attractive not only to investors. As work progressed on the building and truck parts started arriving – and a production manager was hired, all in the first months of 1921 – all kinds of economic spin-off companies were organized. Some were auto-related, others were just shops that assumed an economic benefit of a burgeoning auto manufacturing company.

Brighton at the time was ripe for a big jump in industry. The Gove company extolled the generosity of Brighton’s residents and businessmen for responding so quickly. By March, 1921, the production manager, a “Mr. Petrie,” moved into office space at the new factory and truck parts were being shipped to the Brighton location.

But it wasn’t long before things went bad. It isn’t clear what happened, but no trucks ever were made at this facility. It was rumored that a couple of vehicles were shipped to Brighton to be used in a promotional event. They were to be driven into Detroit, but both broke down on the journey. In December, 1921, the local paper ran articles about the court-ordered public auction of the assets of a then-bankrupt Gove Motor Car Company. A James D. Scovell of Detroit eventually took possession of the property in June, 1921, after he offered more than an initial bid of \$2,500 by William Benham, said to be a Brighton “wool buyer.”

It was not until 1928 when Brighton Wood Products opened business that the Gove building was producing products and employing Brighton residents.

(Compiled by Sheryl James from research by Larry Lawrence of newspaper clippings and contact with the Reno Nevada Historical Society Additions/corrections requested. 810-250-7276.)