

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Part 1—History of the First Brighton State Police Post

Larry Lawrence of Brighton’s Lawrence Autobody worked at the Busy Bee Market, 10840 E. Grand River Avenue, while in high school in the early 1960s. Larry had many unique skills. For this story he had figured out the exact timing of the traffic light at the intersection of Old US 23 and Grand River Ave to make the green light every time. He offered to use that skill to rope-tow Jim Longthorne’s car from his home on Kissane Avenue to the Busy Bee. Jim’s car needed a tow because it had no engine! The adventurous part was that Jim’s car also had no brakes! If they could manage to get the car to the Busy Bee, Larry’s boss Walt Moore had said they could use the electricity to run the tools to work on the now helpless automobile.

They tied the cars together with the rope. Larry waited until the right time to take flight down Grand River and past Old 23. Great news! Larry and his towed rider made it through the green light as planned! Bad news! Two unfortunate things occurred at that moment. The tow rope released as Larry started to brake sending Jim’s car speeding down the hill past Larry’s car. At this same moment, a state policeman saw this successful feat of intersectional manipulation and pursued Jim’s car which couldn’t stop because, of course, it had no brakes. Larry drove off avoiding any consequences. Hopefully, by the time this story publishes, he is covered by a statute of traffic-type limitations!

What happened to Jim? His car finally rolled to a stop about a mile and a half past the light. The police officer gave Jim a ticket for driving without a license plate, driving without a driver’s license, and driving with no brakes. But wait, there’s more! Jim received the ultimate in policing paradoxes: a speeding ticket for a car that had no engine!

One might say that he was unlucky to have been spotted by the state trooper, but I haven’t told you this: the original Michigan State Police Post was located on the northwest corner of two federal highways; US 23 and US 16(Grand River Avenue) until the early 1980s. They towed that car smack in front of the State Police Post! Great Balls of Fire!

Here lies the story of that State Police Post. Speeding had increased and was causing accidents on state roads. By 1924, it was decided to make a special division of the State Police which would give direct attention to highway issues. They were known as the “Flying Squadron” and they were to cooperate with sheriffs and local police. In 1931, through the persuasions of a delegation lead by young attorney, Martin Lavan and Brighton Mayor Boylan, the Governor agreed that Brighton was the best spot to build a State Police Post.

Stay tuned for next month’s feature where I continue the State Police Post history and tell the story of two Brighton state troopers recruited by a U.S. Marshall to help dig a hole next to a house behind the Log Cabin Inn. Why? They were digging to locate two quart jars of nitroglycerin!

(Compiled by Tammy Sexton from the adventurous tales of Larry Lawrence; “From Settlement to City” by Carol McMacken; The Brighton Argus, April 23, 1958. Additions/corrections welcomed. Call 313-910-3807 or email tammyjosexton@yahoo.com)