

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Following is a story from the April 2018 issue of Trail Tales about the GM Proving Ground. This is the current display at the CoBACH Center next to the Millpond in downtown Brighton. We encourage you to visit the **FREE Exhibit** and see the rest of the story and many photos. Display hours are listed on Page 1 and 2 of this newsletter.

History of the

General Motors Proving Ground (GMPG)

In 1923, Alfred Sloan, chairman of General Motors had an idea. General Motors should develop a testing facility that would be representative of road conditions in real life. One that would be consistent in testing all cars and their components. After investigating different locations, they purchased 1,125 acres in a hilly area in the northeast section of Brighton Township known at "The Bluffs." This is one of the highest locations in Livingston County found in Section 13 and the south portion of Section 12. The property also included part of the western section of Milford Township in Oakland County. The majority of the land was in Brighton Township.

Groundbreaking began with 5.6 miles of test roads where 1.7 miles were concrete and 3.9 miles were gravel. Nearby farmers were hired to work developing the roads on the Proving Ground. Local operators and their trucks were hired to move special gravel from the Brighton train depot to the site. North and South Muir and Bamber Roads were closed in early 1924. GMPG incorporated them into some of their test roads.

The first buildings were started in May 1924 and ready for use in November. These were located on the old David Jackson property on the Brighton side of Labadie Road (the county line road). These included a 60' x 200' garage and a 40' x 100' two-story clubhouse. The Brighton Argus reports in April 1926 "...a massive brick entrance building was built—the gatehouse—for \$10,000. Also a residence for Mr. Kreusser, the Director, was built on the eastern side of the property over the county line." The Argus further stated "GM is a deep significance to Brighton and already employs several Brighton people."

As the roads and buildings were being completed so began the hiring. Management looked towards the local farm boys because "they had strength in body and a good work ethic from being on the farms." (Argus) They were hired as mechanics, test drivers etc. The average pay was 50 cents per hour and some worked 7 days a week. With the influx of workers at the GMPG, an increase of housing was needed. Land needed to be cleared and construction crews were needed to build the homes. The building of homes in the Brighton area further stimulated the local economy. The Argus stated in August 1924: "the proximity of the Proving Grounds to Brighton has already contributed to the profits of Brighton businesses. And will continue if we show our interest."

The story continues... please visit the current display at the CoBACH Center downtown Brighton.

(Compiled by Mindy Kinsey from the GM Archives, Brighton Argus and Bill Pless writings.)