

Big Changes, Yet Still a Small Town

Nestled a mere forty five miles west of Detroit stands my hometown of Brighton, Michigan. Growing up there for the past twenty years I have come to adore this place that I call home. Through my upbringing my passion has always revolved around the downtown area that is often called "Main Street." Main Street never ceases to amaze me with its booming business and ever growing business opportunities. Through my case study I was able to see that since the start of the downtown district at the turn of the 19th century to today there have been many factors that have aided to the growth of this area, yet it still maintains the small town feel. Through a rise in suburban growth, technological advances, preservation of downtown, Main Street has been shaped into a major attraction for people today.

Although originally inhabited by many people, Brighton was not settled until 1832 when Maynard Maltby a settler from New York bought a piece of land in the Brighton area. Maltby chose to name this community Ore Creek due to the large water source running through the city. The name was later changed to Brighton in 1838 and then became a village in 1867.¹ With a mere population of 505 people at the time of the 1870 census, Brighton became a small place of settlement.² As years went on there started to be a rise in the population in the Brighton area that continued to grow quickly. I believe that due to white flight from Detroit, Brighton started to become an suburban settlement for those fleeing the city. Without the rise in suburbanization Main Street may not have been able to develop into what the city is made up of today.

¹ Genal Pratt, *The Brighton Area*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 7-8.

² Michigan Department of Education, "Library of Michigan 1870 Census Index." Last modified 2007. Accessed December 2, 2012. <http://www.mdoe.state.mi.us/1870Census>

All through the process of becoming a city Main Street remained to be a central gathering place for those citizens. This is displayed in an image found within the book *The Brighton Area*. The image displays a group of people gathered around the streets in order to observe a Memorial Day parade in the year 1920.³ This image can be viewed in Appendix A (Page 10). We see the same sort of gathering space in today's society through a picture taken at the 2012 Homecoming Parade the goes through the downtown area.⁴ The image located in Appendix B (page 11), displays a large group of people gathering to enjoy the numerous floats and clubs who march down Main Street every year. Displaying the love of the downtown area has allowed me to analyze the various changes over the years.

One major change that seemed to help develop Main Street was the increase in various innovations and technologies. The first was the idea of transportation. In one particular image I was able to observe the distinct characteristics of a dirt road with a horse drawn carriage trotting down Main Street during a homecoming parade in August of 1909.⁵ Appendix C (Page 12). This image is able to display that at this time their main mode of transportation was that of horse drawn carriage through non-paved roads. As time went on there was a need for better roads and this lead to a new innovation brought about to the downtown district. In an image within *The Brighton Area*, we are able to see a photograph, which displays workers constructing a sewage system and paving Main Street in 1924.⁶ Appendix D (Page 13). Due to an overall increase in

³ Genal Pratt, *The Brighton Area*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 13.

⁴ Brighton Ford, "Brighton High School Homecoming 2012." Accessed December 2, 2012.
<http://www.ilovebrightonford.com/2012/09/brighton-high-school-homecoming-2012.html>.

⁵ "Parade Scene." Photograph. August 25, 1909. (accessed November 1, 2012).

⁶ Genal Pratt, *The Brighton Area*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 19.

industrialization in the 20th century, the United States was able to make advances such as the pavement of roads for better transportation. In an article by Marieanna Bair titled *Main Street and Grand River Are Paved* she discusses the impact of the paving of such a significant street. The project cost a whopping \$84,704.60 and the city was granted a \$70,000 bond in order to cover the costs. The machine that was able to provide such a distinct road was called a “vibrolithic.” This machine would shake the poured concrete in order for it to lay better.⁷ Through this new innovation the city was able to pave this street and make the place more accessible to citizens. Although a paved road seems like not a big deal to us today, the photographs showed the major impact such a small feat can make on the town. Today the paved roads still are a common use but rather than carriage we see automobiles controlling the roadways. The street still looks the same as portrayed almost seventy-five years ago, but with more traffic and cars. Through the addition of these paved roads Main Street was able to increase their tourism, which may have aided in the development of further business in the downtown area.

Another form of transportation that helped aid to the Main Street area was the addition of the railroad. In 1871 the railway was laid through Main Street right outside the downtown area. This addition of the railroad allowed people to visit the town and travel from near and far in order to visit.⁸ Another impact the railway had was the ability for people to work farther from home and use the railway in order to transport. For twenty-two cents a person could travel 38

⁷ Bair, Marieanna. Brighton Area Historical Society, "Main Street And Grand River Are Paved." Last modified 2009. Accessed December 3, 2012.
<http://www.brightonareahistorical.com/history/towns/130-main-street-and-grand-river-are-paved>.

⁸ Genal Pratt, *The Brighton Area*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 9.

miles on the train to the Brighton station. This added innovation allowed the downtown area to boom in service and be provided with new business opportunities for many.

Today the same railroad track still is an active part of the Main Street traffic. Although people do not necessarily use this as a method of travel anymore, many trains pass through Main Street on a daily basis. There always seems to be a backed up traffic jam when the 3pm train comes through right as the high school students are getting out of class. The train may be a disconnected part of the downtown area, but without the addition of this railroad, downtown Brighton may have lacked the tourism that came about due to the laying of the tracks some long time ago.

One of these many business opportunities that came due to the railway was that of The Western House Hotel, which was built right next to the newly added railway line. In an image captured I am able to notice the large structure that made home on Main Street. This three-story structure was built in an attempt to house visitors.⁹ Appendix E (Page 14). With analysis of the picture it looks as if the hotel could house all who visited and looks like a highly urbanized structure. This hotel may have been built for salesmen traveling through the railways attempting to sell to merchants and establish a sense of trade via traveling. When looking at the image the building looked all too familiar, and I finally came to the realization that this building still stands on Main Street today. The building has been abandoned for years but now is being renovated in order to be built into a brewery Appendix F (Page 15). In order to obtain more information I chose to research this building and attempted to find out why the building still remains standing today. After some research I found that this building became an United States registered historic

⁹ Ibid. 15.

site in 1986.¹⁰ Through the hope to conserve the environment around them, the United States chose to preserve this site as a way to show the past and preserve this building for the future. I believe that due to the decline in railway travel the hotel began to lose service which lead to is closing in the mid 1900's. The building still remains the same, which shows how history can affect how a city may grow, yet still remain the same.

Although those who settled the Main Street district no longer remain, their impact on the society still continues to be prevalent in this area today. One way that their ideas still remain is through the buildings and businesses still in service on Main Street in today's society. The Western Hotel is not the only building built more than one hundred years ago that still calls Main Street their home. A major building that many people come to recognize is that of the Old Town Hall.¹¹ Appendix G (Page 16). In 1876 this building was constructed and began to hold many offices within it including a jail, firehouse, and library.¹² Today the building still remains after recent renovations and ironically is the home of the Brighton Area Historical Society. The building still contains the tower that was used in order to inform of a fire within the city.¹³ Appendix H (Page 17). The societies love of conservation is a way that allows them to keep the building looking almost the same as it did in the 1980's.

¹⁰ National Park Services, "National Register of Historic Places." Accessed December 4, 2012. <http://nrhp.focus.nps.gov/natregsearchresult.do?fullresult=true&recordid=0>.

¹¹ Genal Pratt, *The Brighton Area*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 9.

¹² Bair, Marieanna. Brighton Area Historical Society, "Brighton's Old Town Hall." Accessed December 6, 2012. <http://www.brightonareahistorical.com/history/buildings/121-brightons-old-town-hall>.

¹³ "Old Town Hall." Accessed December 3, 2012. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/eridony/3956158448/in/set-72157622455954018>.

Throughout our class periods we have discussed the settlement of cities around a main source, and that is water. Downtown Brighton is no different than any other civilization in that Main Street resides around the infamous water source we like to call the Mill Pond. Through my research I was able to obtain a picture of the millpond from the year 1910. ¹⁴ Appendix I (Page 18). The water source contains a floating dock for bands to entertain on as well as various wildlife such as ducks. In comparing the picture from back then to how the pond looks now there are some apparent changes. I observed the decrease in the water level of the pond, which may indicate a tragedy of the commons and the overuse of this natural resource. There have been numerous structural aids built such as bridges and sidewalks to add to the leisure of the park. ¹⁵ Appendix J (Page 19). By analyzing these pictures I was able to determine how the use of water can play a major role in the development of this business district. One concern that has been raised is that if we continue the overuse of this water resource we may find the resource deteriorating away in the near future.

In order to fully understand the growth of Main Street I chose to look at an aerial photography taken in 2007 of the downtown area. The aerial photo shows the rise in buildings down the street and the addition of various parking spaces to accommodate those visiting this area. Appendix K (Page 20). There is a two way paved road which shows the additional technology added since the start of the pavement. ¹⁶ When comparing that to a picture of Main

¹⁴ Genal Pratt, *The Brighton Area*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 14.

¹⁵ "Brighton, MI." Accessed December 4, 2012. http://pics.tumundito.com/members/Marnella/Estados_Unidos/Brighton_Michigan.

¹⁶ Andersen, Collin. "Brighton, MI: Downtown Brighton." Last modified 2007. Accessed December 6, 2012. <http://www.city-data.com/picfilesv/picv27527.php>.

Street in 1910, I observed a much different view. Appendix L (Page 21). Here there is no traffic, with only one carriage on the road as well as different buildings consisting of stores and restaurants. Although there are some distinct characteristics that show the changes made over time, the street still resembles that of the past when comparing the two pictures.

Main Street today continues to be a booming enterprise in which I have grown up seeing businesses booming. Now Brighton alone has a population of almost 28,000 residents.¹⁷ The street now contains almost 50 restaurants, stores, and businesses. Through technological innovations such as electricity, sidewalks, and automobiles this street remains a central location for numerous gatherings. By analyzing various sources I was able to draw some major conclusions on the environmental and historical impact on Main Street. With the turn of the 20th century industrialization and suburbanization began to take over the culture of the United States. People began moving from the city and away from their work in order to establish their family. Main Street may have benefited from this road to suburbanization by allowing people to move to this village and provide funds and support into the Main Street district.

Technology played a major role on the change in which we have witnessed over time on Main Street. Whether the introduction of the railroad or the paving of the main road, both these advancements aided in the accessibility into this area, which may have contributed heavily to the success of this small area. Without the technological advancements Main Street may have found that they would have gone under. Due to these key implementations, Main Street was able to continue the tourism and establish trade amongst one another.

¹⁷ United States Census Bureau, "Livingston County, Michigan ." Accessed December 5, 2012.
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/26/26093.html>.

The settlers of Brighton were able to keep their settlement in a sense through the conservation of buildings still remaining on Main Street. I believe that these buildings have helped towards the success of Main Street by making the area feel similar to when it was first created. The history of this area aids in the development of the city for centuries to come. Without the conservation of these buildings the people of Brighton would not have the history to enjoy about the Main Street they like to call home.

Finally the use of water may have played a major role on the continued growth and development of Main Street. Being located around the Mill Pond the city was able to use this as a reliable water source for their city. As time went on they continued to overuse the water and in turn there became a decrease in the water supply. This provides a problem for the future of Main Street. Although the Mill Pond does not seem like a significant thing, by over using the water the downtown district may run out of the natural resource available for their survival. By striving to esteem a more sustainable method Main Street can work towards being more sufficient in their water use.

The small town that I have grown up in has grown tremendously since the settlement in the early 1800's. Through this case study I hoped to analyze the major impacts that were made on this district that has allowed me to love the place I call home. Many factors such as suburban growth, technology, preservation, and natural resources have aided in the continued development of Main Street. Without these factors Main Street may not have experienced the increased business and booming economy that is experiences today.

Bibliography

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Appendix A



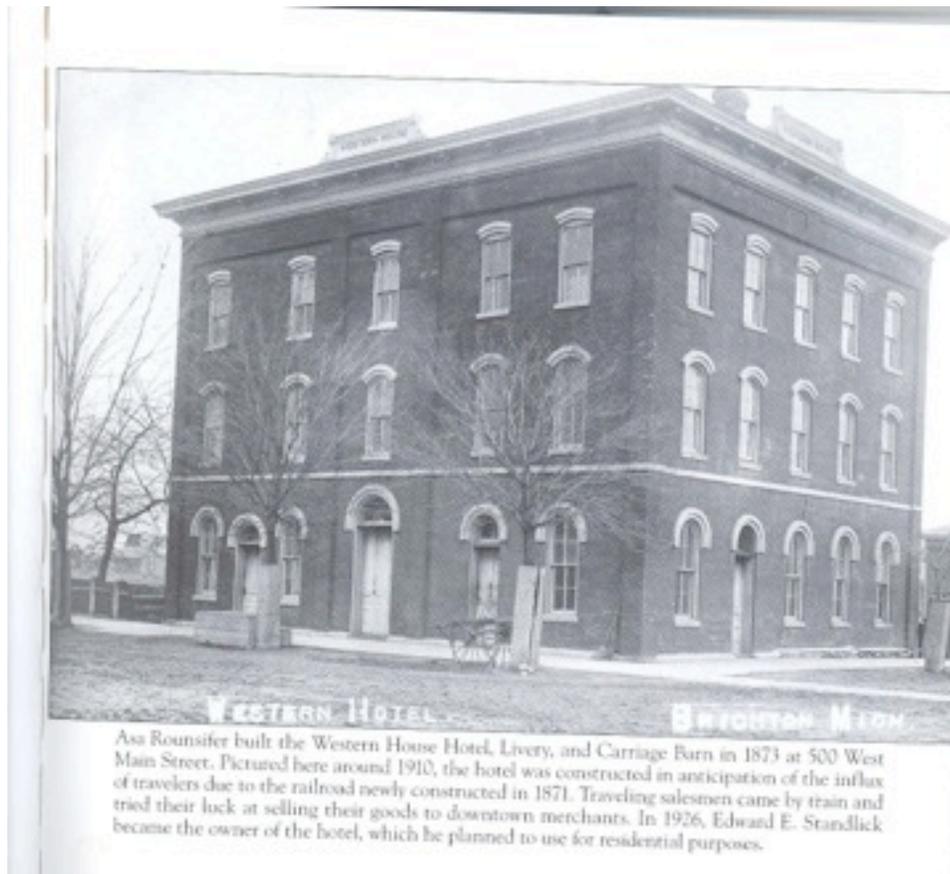
Appendix C



Appendix D



Appendix E



Appendix F



Appendix G



Never seen before by the people of Brighton, huge machines tear up Main Street in the process of laying sewers and paving the road in April 1924. Grand River Avenue and Main Street were most likely paved at the same time utilizing the same equipment, ultimately making it more affordable for Brighton. Rolison's Hardware sits to the left and is still there today.

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Appendix H



Used here around 1909, John Tanner is on the right, with the long white beard. He was a tall man, only reaching five feet, but his beard was over six feet long. He would wrap his beard in paper and tuck it into his shirt and pants. Many people paid to see him reveal his famous long beard at carnivals. Henry Ford took interest in him. Tanner's hack "coach" (seen here) was later purchased by Henry Ford, and it is still on display at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan.

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Appendix I



In this view facing east from Main Street, Grand River Avenue is visible around 1910. The building on the left remained a bank for many years before it became the Yum Yum Tree in 1980. The third storefront on the left is the post office. To the right, the small black building is the Honest Scrap building. Two storefronts past Honest Scrap, a millinery shop carried fashionable ladies' hats.