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The Mayors of Rochester's Mid Years: 1860-1900

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Twenty men held the office of Mayor of Rochester in the forty years following 1861. Most of them served for one year only, though two were elected a second year, and after 1872, when the term was extended to two years, Cornelius R. Parsons served for seven consecutive terms and George E. Warner for two. Most of the men were competent executives and several played important roles in Rochester's history, but only three, who served two, four, and fourteen years, achieved distinction during their terms as Mayor.

Of the twenty mayors, thirteen were Republicans and seven Democrats, but Parsons, who was a Republican, and Warner and Henry L. Fish, Democrats, each broke with his party at one point and won reelection with independent support. Party alignments were not too firm throughout most of this period, not at least until the last decade, when George W. Aldridge began to emerge as the Republican boss. Yet since neither party had a fixed program, the fact that their representation on the Common Council fluctuated sharply, frequently presenting the

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Mayor with an opposition majority, was not a major handicap. The Councils like the mayors, were weak, though for different reasons, and in an effort to achieve effective government local and state officials transferred a number of important governmental functions to independent commissions and created a bitter political controversy in the process.

Yet the mayors, despite their impotence, supplied the best symbols of community unity, and several of them were able, because of the strength of their personalities, to provide real leadership. Although only one was born in Rochester, twelve of them were natives of New York or New England villages who had come to Rochester in their youth and grew up with the city. Four were born abroad, but each of these had been brought to America by his parents, and all but one had spent most of their adult years in Rochester. All but six of the twenty had served an apprenticeship on the Common Council and five of the six exceptions had previously held other civic posts. Although chiefly engaged in business—as merchants, industrialists, bankers, real estate dealers, contractors, attorneys—most of these men had found time to assume civic and fraternal responsibilities, from which in fact they acquired the experience they needed for the Mayor's office. A brief review of their careers will shed much light on the civic life of Rochester during its middle period.

One-Year Mayors

Like the pre-Civil War mayors (reviewed in an earlier issue of *Rochester History*), those elected at Rochester in the 1860's served only one-year terms. Henry L. Fish stood for and won a second term, and Samuel W. D. Moore, Mayor of Rochester in 1859, was again elected to that office in 1866. But generally their influence was short-lived as the needs of their families called them back to private business, where most of them earned much more than the \$1500 they received for a year as mayor.

JOHN C. NASH, Rochester's 28th Mayor, was elected in March 1861 a few weeks before the outbreak of the Civil War. A Republican, like his two immediate predecessors, he was a loyal supporter of President Lincoln and hastened the next month to name a Relief Committee to assist the needy dependents of some of the men recruited in Rochester.

Born at Caledonia in neighboring Livingston County in 1804, young John had come to Rochester to study law in the office of Daniel D. Barnard in 1827. He became Rochester's first city clerk in 1834 and county clerk in 1846. As a Whig he won election as an alderman from the Sixth Ward in 1852 and again in 1854. The newly organized Republicans returned him to that office in 1859 and elected him Mayor in 1861. Gratified by that honor, Nash hastened to Albany and New York City to study the administrations of those larger cities and shortly returned with plans for the reorganization of the police and fire departments. His first action was to direct all members of the police force to acquire standard uniforms and to wear them at all times when on duty. His inaugural address to the Council revealed a firm grasp of the Mayor's responsibilities, but the outbreak of the war quickly diverted his attention.

While the task of mobilizing the community for war did not fall directly on the Mayor, he could not disregard it. Mayor Nash made a hasty journey to Washington in August to see the recruiting officials and to greet the 13th New York State Volunteers, the first unit mustered from Rochester and already recuperating at Fort Bennett from the severe losses it had suffered in the battle of Bull Run. An increasing concern for the men at the front overshadowed civic affairs during the rest of Nash's term.

Astute investments in real estate had early provided Nash with a comfortable income, enabling him as Mayor to entertain the Councilmen and other officials on several occasions. Although generally popular, he did not seek reelection, for public

opinion was swinging against the war and to the Democrats who had opposed it. On his retirement, Nash accepted appointment as a director of the Genesee Valley Railroad and later served on the reception committee for the Monroe County Fair. Many friends mourned his death in February 1866.

MICHAEL FILON, who succeeded Nash as Mayor in April 1862, had long been his chief Democratic rival in the Sixth Ward, which he also represented for two terms in the Council. Born at Auburn in 1820, Filon had come to Rochester as a lad and was apprenticed to a local carriage maker. In 1840 he established a carriage shop of his own on Main St. and twelve years later won his first election as alderman. A popular lodge member and a backer of the Union Course, Rochester's first driving park, Filon received the Democratic nomination for Mayor in 1862 and won a plurality of 42 votes in a light turn-out that March.

The Democrats had launched an economy drive early in the year, proposing that the mayor's salary be abolished. While they met defeat on that proposal, the mayor's salary was reduced from \$2000 to \$1500, and Filon modestly accepted the cut. A more cautious man than his predecessors, he used his authority as mayor to suspend a council resolution that granted a 20-year franchise to a street railroad company in June, thus delaying for almost a year the successful establishment of the city's first horse-car line. His argument that such an irrevocable action deserved more deliberation, attracted support in the Council but spurred a move by his opponents to deprive the mayor of his function as Chairman of the Common Council. When the legislature hastily adopted that change without consulting the Council, that body protested and in fact reelected Mayor Filon as chairman.

Filon in his turn accepted new responsibilities after the conclusion of his term as Mayor. Elected a trustee in 1871 of the East Side Savings Bank, he later became its vice-president and

was for some years a trustee and president of both the Bay Railroad and the Empire State Insurance Co. His estate, following his death in 1893, provided generous bequests to each of the city's three hospitals and to the Rochester Orphan Asylum and left \$7000 for a monument in Mt. Hope Cemetery.

MICHAEL C. BRADSTREET, who succeeded Filon as Mayor in April 1863, was also a Democrat and a former alderman. In that capacity he had been one of the signers in 1861 of a resolution favoring the conciliatory Crittenden Amendments, which prompted some opponents to label him a "Copperhead." Friends of the Mayor rallied to his defense and cited his many services to the community as proof of his loyalty.

A native of Massachusetts, Bradstreet had come to Rochester as a lad in 1839 by canal boat. He soon found a job as a clerk in the shoe firm of his uncle, Jacob Gould, who had served in 1835-36, as Rochester's second Mayor. Young Bradstreet followed his uncle's lead in politics and became a Democrat; he also developed similar interests in local militia companies and became a Captain of the Rochester Dragoons in 1842. Fourteen years later he was nominated and elected supervisor of the Fifth Ward. In 1859 he became alderman for that ward and served in this capacity until his election as Mayor in 1863.

As a councilman, Bradstreet had chaired the committee that recruited the 13th Regiment, and as Mayor he welcomed the 190 remaining members who returned to Rochester for their discharge in May 1863. As a councilman he had opposed the hasty chartering of a horse-car line in 1862, but as Mayor he refused to block its extension provided the consent of neighboring property owners was secured. Such home-front concerns were, however, overshadowed by those arising from the conduct of the war. The Mayor visited Washington to check on the administration of the draft and responded by taking proper precautions when notified by Secretary Stanton of a rumor that

a group of rebel sympathizers in Canada planned to seize a steamer on the lake to attack and liberate an encampment of prisoners at Buffalo. He made vigorous efforts to spur local enlistments and called for broader support for the Soldier's Relief Committee. Shortly after his retirement as Mayor, Bradstreet journeyed again to Washington to investigate conditions in some of the hospital encampments; appalled by the overcrowding and by the terrible suffering he encountered, the ex-Mayor persuaded the authorities to transfer over 425 wounded to the newly established St. Mary's and City hospitals in Rochester.

Bradstreet declined a Democratic nomination to succeed himself in 1864, preferring instead to take his old seat in the Council. He accepted the nomination for Mayor a year later, however, and when defeated by the resurgent Republicans, ran successfully for the Assembly in 1867 and 1869. Although he returned to Massachusetts in his last years, his body was brought back to Rochester for burial at his death in 1910.

When Bradstreet declined renomination in March 1864, the Democrats turned to JAMES BRACKETT, a successful businessman and former councilman who won by the narrow margin of 167 votes. Popularly known as Colonel because of his activity as the head of the City Dragoons in the mid-fifties, Brackett had joined Bradstreet and others in support of the Crittenden Amendments, but the charge of "Copperhead" was no longer so widely heard in 1864, when every man willing to support the Union was welcomed as loyal. Moreover, the new Mayor's business successes won him wide respect.

James Brackett had come to Rochester in 1838 to establish the wholesale firm of Brackett, Averill, & Co. He prospered and married Mary Adams of Brockport in 1850. He joined and rose to the rank of lieutenant in the Rochester Cavalry in 1852 and was chosen Colonel by the First City Dragoons two years later. When the Whigs nominated him as alderman from the First

Ward that year, he declined the honor, citing out-of-town commitments that would conflict with his proper service to that body. He did, in fact, remove his wholesale business to New York City in 1855, but quickly sold out and returned to Rochester where in 1860 he was again nominated as an alderman, this time by the Democrats. Although the Republicans now protested that his outside concerns, at this point in Michigan, would limit his participation, Brackett won the election and proved a fairly faithful attendant at the Council meetings. In 1863 he traded his investments in Adrian, Michigan, for the old Lawrence Hotel in Rochester, which he renamed the Brackett House and proceeded to enlarge and remodel as the best hotel overlooking the Central Station on Mill Street.

Brackett's accomplishments won him an appointment as director of the Rochester Savings Bank in 1862 and of the Rochester and Genesee Valley Railroad three years later. He had previously acquired an interest in an oil well in western Pennsylvania and in 1865 became President of the Pennsylvania Tubing and Transportation Co., an early pipeline venture. His duties as Mayor were somewhat lighter than those of his predecessors since the legislature had finally adopted the charter amendment separating the function of Mayor from those of President of the Council. Relieved of the need to attend its sessions, he was content with the dispatch of an occasional message or veto, most of which were disregarded or overridden. In compliance with a request from Washington, he issued a proclamation in August 1864 closing all public buildings on the 4th and inviting all citizens to observe a day of national humiliation to be spent in prayer for the war's end. That happy conclusion was still many months distant, and "Colonel" Brackett had returned to private life before it was reached.

His business career continued to prosper. After amassing a small fortune in oil, he engaged in the salt mining business for

a time and became director of the Lake Shore Railway in the early 1870's and a trustee and vice-president in the Bank of Monroe, as well as of the Rochester Savings Bank, which in 1890 elected him its president. When nominated a second time for Mayor in 1876, he was defeated by Cornelius Parsons and did not again engage in civic contests. Although the removal of the N. Y. Central Station to St. Paul Street east of the river left his old Brackett House somewhat isolated, the ex-Mayor's other affairs remained in a prosperous state until his death in 1904.

Renewed confidence, following Lincoln's reelection in November 1864, enabled the Republicans to capture the Mayor's office the next March. DANIEL D. T. MOORE, their candidate, received a plurality of only 175 votes over former Mayor Bradstreet, but with a firm control of the Council the Republicans seemed ready to take full advantage of the peace as soon as it was achieved.

Endowed with a towering stature and possessing a warm personality and contagious smile, Daniel Moore seemed a better candidate for Mayor than his training would have suggested. Son of a Baptist minister, he had come to Rochester as a lad of 15 in 1835 and secured a job as a printer's devil at the *Genesee Farmer*. Within a decade he became its editor and, after its removal to Albany in 1850, established his own paper, Moore's *Rural New Yorker*. A devoted champion of agricultural interests, he took a hand in bringing the State Agricultural Fair to Rochester in 1862 and in the process became president of the Monroe County Agricultural Society and of the Rochester Athenaeum and Mechanics Association, both in 1857. Winning a reputation as a public speaker on agricultural subjects, he soon found himself on political platforms as well and finally in 1863 was chosen alderman from the Third Ward. Two years later he was nominated and elected Mayor of Rochester by the

Republicans.

As Mayor he had the sad duty of leading the community in mourning Lincoln's death and of accompanying the funeral train as it journeyed westward through Rochester. Perhaps his most significant action was the appointment of representatives of Rochester's ethnic minorities to the Soldier's Relief Committee in recognition of the large contributions they had made to winning the war. A few years after his retirement as Mayor, Moore moved his *Rural New Yorker* to New York City. He lost control of it during the depression of the mid-seventies and after many years of adversity died in poverty in 1892.

To avoid an open split in the party, the radical Republicans, who supported the Freedman's Bureau, and the conservative Republicans, who supported Johnson, chose as Daniel Moore's successor a compromise candidate SAMUEL W. D. MOORE, who had served as Mayor in 1859. No relation to his predecessor, he also differed sharply in the extent of his political experience.

Born in Waterford, Connecticut, in 1806, he had come to Rochester with his family in 1827 and soon entered the mercantile business with his brother. He was elected an alderman from the Fourth Ward in 1839 and in 1846 and 1848 received the same post from the Eighth Ward. He served for twelve years as police justice, four years on the Board of Managers of the Western House of Correction, one term each on the Board of Supervisors, the Board of Health, and the Board of Education. Originally a Whig, he helped organize the Know Nothing Party in 1854 and later helped unite it with the Whigs to form the Republican Party, winning its nomination and the election as Mayor in 1859, and now again in 1865.

As Mayor he managed to please both the radical and conservative factions of the party and also to appease the liquor interests by granting additional franchises. Among his recommendations to the Council was one for the creation of a public

park between the river and the canal feeder, but that proposal, like an earlier one for the purchase of Falls Field for a park, was tabled as too costly. Moore was popular with city and county officials and had many friends, especially among the Masons; and that lodge officiated at his funeral in 1870.

The Democratic Union Party finally shook off its Copperhead tradition by nominating and electing HENRY L. FISH as Mayor in 1867, and again in 1868. Born at Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1815, he came to Rochester in 1840, after earlier stops in Williamson and Newark where he developed a canal boating trade. In Rochester he established a transportation company and later a towing company, and increasingly engaged in the promotion of real estate. He represented the Eighth Ward as an alderman in 1850, 1856, and from 1862 to 1866. He served it as school commissioner for three years and supervisor for two, and thus brought a rich experience in civic affairs to the Mayor's office on his election in March 1867.

The chief issue in that election was economy, and Fish, who as councilman had spearheaded an investigation of the misuse of the poor fund, won the support of many leading citizens from both parties. His decisive victory swung the control of the Council to the Democrats, too, and when the Republicans reformed their ranks and nominated William A. Reynolds in 1868, Mayor Fish's popularity assured his reelection—the first Rochester Mayor to be accorded that honor. Perhaps the most controversial incident in his two terms occurred in 1858 when he accepted an invitation to attend a reception in honor of Bishop McQuaid, head of the newly created Rochester Diocese. A staunch Presbyterian, his action must have pleased many Catholic Democrats, and the party urged him to stand for a third term. Although he declined that nomination, he was ready three years later to run for the Assembly where an issue of great importance to Rochester was about to be decided.

As Councilman and Mayor, Henry Fish had supported the growing demand for a separate City Hall. It was after his retirement that the move developed strength and stirred controversy over its location and construction. When one group of aldermen acquired title to a site on Front St. and endeavored to promote the construction of a City Hall there, another group, allied with Assemblyman Jarvis Lord, pushed a bill through the legislature creating a commission to build a City Hall in Rochester, and another to construct a water system. Ex-Mayor Fish, indignant at the loss of local democratic control over these important functions, protested the creation of legislative commissions, and when the Democrats nominated Lord for the Assembly, he accepted a Republican-Union nomination to oppose him and won a seat in that body in 1872.

Although it was too late to halt work on the two major construction jobs, Assemblyman Fish did assist Governor Tilden in uncovering the hidden interest of Jarvis Lord in the contracts and thus ousted him from control. When an Executive Board was created to take over the city's major construction work, Fish was chosen a member and served for three years as its president. He was prominently mentioned for governor in 1882, but another reform Mayor from a larger city, Grover Cleveland of Buffalo, received the nomination and won the election. A kindly and bearded old man, ex-Mayor Fish died at the age of 80 in 1895 leaving an estate value at a modest \$9000.

EDWARD M. SMITH who succeeded Fish as Mayor in 1869, was the first native-born Rochesterian to occupy that office. Son of Silas O. Smith, Edward grew up with Rochester and participated in many of its institutions. Educated in its schools, plus a brief term at an Albany academy, experienced as a clerk and teller in its stores and banks and as an officer in its social and cultural institutions, he became a warden of Christ Church in the same year, 1852, that he won election as alderman from the

Seventh Ward. He represented the ward as supervisor in 1860 and served on the board of the City Hospital in its formative years. His election as Mayor by the Republicans represented an effort by that party to regain respectability and to restore the harmony lost in bitter post-war feuds. His inaugural address reviewed the city's growth as a milling and market town but noted the recent development of new industries there and urged that efforts be made by the city to promote the new industrial expansion. With the Council split 14 to 14, he welcomed the end of his term and after making a second trip to Europe returned to become Postmaster of Rochester until appointed in 1876 as Consul at Mannheim in Germany where he served for eight years before his death in 1884.

The Democrats recaptured the Mayor's office in 1870 by naming as their candidate JOHN LUTES, who was born not in Rochester but in Wurtenburg, Germany, and was the city's first German-born Mayor. He easily defeated Ezra R. Andrews, a representative of an old Rochester family, but the Republicans who captured control of the Council, paid little heed to his recommendations. Yet John Lutes, who had come to Rochester at the age of 20 in 1835, and soon established a millwright shop on Mill St., was an experienced politician who could not easily be disregarded. Active in Democratic party councils after 1851, he served as alderman from 1857 to 1860 and again, 1867-1869. A recent change in the charter had given the Mayor a veto, compensating for his loss of the presidency of the council, and Mayor Lutes exercised the power more frequently than either of his two predecessors who had possessed the power. The resulting stalemate may have spurred the search for a method to bypass the mayor and council by the creation of state-appointed commissions. One of his vetoes, which saved the city an annual income of \$18,000 by obstructing the sale of Genesee Valley Ry. bonds, earned him the name of "Honest John," and in 1880

brought him an appointment as street inspector. Lutes also helped to found and later became vice-president of the German Insurance Co. and attained a high place in the Masonic order, which officiated at his funeral in 1887.

Few mayors were more proud of the title than CHARLES W. BRIGGS, who captured it for the Republicans in April 1871. His narrow victory was a defeat for Henry E. Rochester, fifth son of the village founder. That circumstance may have added to his triumph, for Briggs, as a seedman, was a representative of the industry that had supplanted the old flour milling industry of the city's youth. Briggs had come to Rochester as a lad of 13 in 1833 and had learned his trade as a clerk in the pioneer seed store. His own establishment, Briggs & Bros., founded in 1850, was now one of the two leading seed firms, and he took an especial delight in arranging floral displays for official events during his administration. He also collaborated with a Citizens Committee in persuading the legislature in 1872 to create a City Hall Commission and a Water Works Commission, both to be appointed by the Mayor. When the City Hall Commission took over the task of constructing that building and chose a site back of the Court House, Mayor Briggs called the Council into special session with the object of halting further work on the Front St. site. A compromise was reached authorizing the construction of a two-story structure there to house fire-fighting equipment and other public functions.

That last action was hardly a triumphant conclusion for his term, and the ex-Mayor hastily embarked on a trip to Europe for recuperation before returning to the management of his firm. Although an enthusiastic fisherman and a lover of outdoor sports he refused to retire until at the age of 75 he turned the business over to his six sons as the Briggs Brothers Seed Co. two years before his death in 1899.

Two-Year Terms

A charter amendment adopted in 1871 provided two-year terms for the Mayor and other elective officials. This change, accompanied by action creating independent commissions to plan and execute important public functions, was not designed to enhance the mayor's influence but to reduce that of the Common Council. The longer term did, nevertheless, give the Mayor a better opportunity to establish a reputation, as at least two of the ten men who held that office during the next three decades demonstrated.

A. CARTER WILDER, the first Mayor elected under the new regime in April 1872, failed to grasp the opportunity and resigned before the end of his term. A relative stranger to Rochester, Wilder had spent seven years in the city during the fifties before migrating to Kansas where he was active in Republican politics and became a Congressman in 1863-64. Returning to Rochester in 1866, he helped to found the *Evening Express* and became a director of the Mechanics Savings Bank. Off again, this time for a year in Europe, he was back in Rochester in time to accept the Republican nomination as Mayor in March 1872 and gave Henry E. Rochester his second defeat by a 92-vote margin.

Wilder had been chosen deliberately as an outsider in order to free the party slate from the odium attached to its former leaders because of their complicity in the creation of the independent commissions. He, however, made the appointments, and repercussions from that controversy plagued his administration. Dispirited and suffering from ill health, he resigned early in the second year to make a trip to Europe. He died two years later in San Francisco.

GEORGE W. ALDRIDGE, SR., President of the Council, completed Wilder's term as Acting Mayor. Born in Clinton County, N. Y.,

in 1833, young George had come to Rochester as a lad and became a successful contractor. A genial and popular man, an active Mason, Aldridge won election as alderman from the First Ward in 1871 and held that post until his death. He was chosen President of the Council in 1872 and continued in that capacity while serving as Acting Mayor. His firm shared in the contracts for the construction of the City Hall, the Free Academy (now the Board of Education Building) and other public works. As a director of the Rochester, Nunda, and Pennsylvania Ry. he pressed the Council to provide a subsidy for its construction. At the conclusion of his term, he also journeyed to Europe, but his mission was to seek funds for the railroad, and on his return he rejoined the Council where he remained an active member until stricken down at the age of 44 in 1877.

A reform faction within the Republican Party secured the mayoralty nomination in 1874 for GEORGE A. CLARKSON, a merchant tailor who had no previous experience in public office. Born in Edinburg, Scotland, in 1811, he had come to America as a lad with his parents and after learning his trade in New York had moved to Rochester in 1842. He soon joined the Athenaeum and Mechanics Association, of which he became a leader, and in 1863 was the first man of foreign birth to be elected a trustee of the Monroe County Savings Bank. Proud of the quality of the clothing he produced, he made frequent trips to New York and abroad to purchase superior grades of cloth and to keep abreast of the latest fashions. When several friends proposed his name for the Assembly in 1864, Clarkson declined the honor. Ten years later, after becoming active in a citizens reform movement in protest against the rings that appeared to dominate both parties, he accepted the nomination for Mayor as a public duty. His opponent by a strange circumstance, was Frederick Cook, a highly respected member of the German community and Rochester's first German-born banker and in-

surance man who was nominated by a reform faction of the Democratic Party.

When Clarkson won, he proceeded to oust Daniel Warner, an old-line Democrat from the public works department. Warner, however, had broken with Fish and the reform Democrats who now controlled the Council, and the Republican Mayor was able to work in harmony with that faction and with ex-Mayor Fish, now in the Assembly, to procure the creation in 1876 of a new Executive Board to take over the unfinished duties of the water works and city hall commissions. Under the new law, the Mayor had the power to appoint three of the six members while the other three were chosen by popular vote. Despite a pledge of strict economy during the campaign, Mayor Clarkson had to increase his budget in order to rush these and other projects to completion. At least he had the pleasure of moving the Mayor's office into the new City Hall in December 1874. Clarkson withdrew from public life at the close of his term, but served for several years as president of the Monroe County Savings Bank and for 26 years as president of the New York State Institution for Deaf-Mutes. He lived to the ripe age of 94 in 1905.

CORNELIUS R. PARSONS, who succeeded Clarkson as Mayor in 1876, had a long career in public service, with seven years of experience on the Common Council before his election as Mayor, in which post he served for an unprecedented fourteen years, and then eight more as state senator. Born at York, in nearby Livingston County in 1842, he was the son of English-born Thomas Parsons, a lumber merchant who settled in the Rochester area in 1832 and likewise served as an alderman for several years in the 1850's and as a state assemblyman and then a state senator in the 1860's. Cornelius entered his father's lumber business and at the age of 25 won his first bid for the Council as a Republican from the Fourteenth Ward. Reelected

in 1868 he was promptly chosen president of the Council and held that office for two terms. A dapper man, always immaculately attired, he frequently wore a rosebud in his lapel when in public and seemed a logical candidate for Mayor in 1876 when the creation of the Executive Board removed many functions from the sphere of the Council and the Mayor. He won by a decisive margin of 2216 over ex-Mayor Brackett, his Democrat rival, although the Democrats again captured the Council.

Mayor Parsons developed an unexpected strength in his new position. His long experience gave him an easy command of public affairs, as his inaugural address displayed. One of his first duties was to appoint three members of the new Executive Board to balance the three elected in March, and his appointments (including two Democrats, one of them Henry L. Fish, who was chosen chairman) won wide approval. He voiced the general desire for economy, now that the water works and the City Hall were completed, and he made frequent use of his veto power to check unnecessary outlays by the Council. Readily accorded the party's renomination in 1878, and again in 1880, he led the ticket with increasing majorities. A revised charter in 1880 stripped the Mayor of his power to appoint $\frac{1}{2}$ the members of the Executive Board which now became entirely elective, but gave him a fixed post on the Board of Police and the power to name the Board of Health. When the editor of the *Union and Advertiser*, the opposition paper, attacked the Mayor for his incompetence in these fields, Parsons responded by delivering the longest Mayor's address yet received by the Council. His mastery of the situation was clearly demonstrated, and although a Labor Reform Party nominated a candidate for Mayor in 1882, Parsons easily won the three-way contest, and won again in 1884 by a majority of 4100 votes.

Mayor Parsons presided graciously at the city's semi-centennial observance in June 1884, but new issues already demanded

his attention. A local Civil Service Reform Association, headed by Theodore Bacon, had become increasingly critical, since its formation in 1882, of partisan appointments. The Mayor, responding to its demands, had removed an incompetent health officer in 1883 but he lacked power under the charter to move in most instances. When the legislature passed the Civil Service Reform Law, to take effect in January 1884, the association again charged the Mayor with laxity, but Parsons had readied plans for the first local examinations of civil service candidates which was held at the City Hall that April. Since the Mayor had few appointments to make, and since the Council refused to recognize the law's application to its appointments, members of the Civil Service Reform Association met with other community leaders in September and organized a new Municipal Reform League to draft a new city charter. The League enrolled several ex-Mayors among its 50 members, and Mayor Parsons hastened, in response to its request to sponsor a public meeting on charter reform with Mayor Seth Low of Brooklyn as the principal speaker. When Seth Low, reform Mayor of Brooklyn under its new strong-mayor charter, advocated a similar charter for Rochester, as the only way to assure effective administration, Mayor Parsons, who had repeatedly made such a proposal, felt vindicated.

The Mayor's endorsement of the civil service and charter reformers did not, however, please a strong faction within his party. As a result, its nominating convention in February 1886 submitted the name of James D. Casey as its candidate while the Democrats submitted George W. Archer, a former councilman associated with the reform movement. Fortunately for Parsons, the Independent Labor League, which had run candidates sympathetic to the workingmen on three previous occasions and which had been favorably impressed by Parsons' refusal to man the horsecars with policemen during a recent

strike, met and hastily named him its candidate. When a week later the labor party staged a torch light parade in Parson's behalf, distinguished community leaders such as D. W. Powers, Samuel Wilder, and former Congressman Alfred Ely joined its ranks. The Mayor's popularity assured his victory, but its proportion surprised even his friends, for the count stood 9701 for Parsons, 5949 for Archer, and only 765 for Casey.

With that victory behind him, Mayor Parsons could turn his attention to other matters. Perhaps the most crucial in the long run of the city's development was the campaign for the creation of a park system. The initiative was again taken by a group of citizens headed in this case by Dr. Edward Mott Moore and George W. Elliott an accomplished reporter who had won election as a Democrat alderman from the Seventh Ward. On the latter's motion the Council in May 1887 created a committee to consider an offer from Ellwanger and Barry of a hilltop site for a public park. The committee headed by Elliott brought in a favorable report but could not get the Council to vote on its proposal, including an expenditure of \$130,000 for park improvements. In this impasse, the friends of the park assisted by Parsons secured the enactment at Albany of an act creating a Park Commission with authority to spend up to \$300,000 for land and improvements and \$20,000 a year for maintenance. On its passage in early 1888 the Mayor finally accepted the Ellwanger and Barry gift of 20 acres that became the core of Highland Park.

As a result Parsons easily defeated Elliott who ran as his Democrat opponent in the mayoralty contest in 1888. Yet his frequent use of the veto power that year stirred new opposition particularly for halting street improvement that would have supplied jobs to needy workingmen. Although his labor friends had endorsed his nomination by the Republicans in 1888, they endorsed his Democrat rival William Carroll in 1890 and much

to everybody's surprise Carroll won with a scant plurality of 346 out of a total of almost 20,000 votes. An accident, as it appeared, Parsons was not perturbed and when nominated to the Assembly in 1891 easily won a seat there and moved up the next year to the Senate where he served four full terms before his death in January 1901.

WILLIAM CARROLL, who terminated Parsons' long regime in 1890, was a Democratic contractor who had represented the Fifth Ward as a school commissioner, a supervisor, and an alderman for brief terms in the late fifties and early sixties. Irish-born, he had early mastered the mason's trade and readily accepted appointment to the post of street superintendent in 1863. In that capacity he made periodic checks for the city on the construction of public buildings in the seventies, and in 1880 he became fire marshall holding the office for four years. After two years in New York, supervising a construction job there, he returned to Rochester in time to accept a nomination nobody wanted and became Rochester's forty-second Mayor. Although his inaugural address to the Council was brief compared to those of his predecessors, it displayed a practical grasp of his duties, which in his view included the enforcement of the Sabbath-closing law against saloons. His vigorous action in this respect proved the most dramatic of his term, and at its close, when another Irishman, put up by the Republicans, captured the lead, Carroll returned to private contracting in which he was occupied until his death at the age of 81 in 1908.

The Republicans, who had broken the long hold of the Democrats on the Common Council in 1891, elected a popular surgeon, DR. RICHARD CURRAN, as Mayor the next year. Born in Ireland in 1838 and brought to America by his parents at the age of 12, he had grown up in Seneca Falls, where he graduated from the local academy and a medical school. He became a surgeon in the Civil War and, after receiving a Congressional

medal for his distinguished service, came to Rochester in 1865. He was elected to the School Board in 1876 and appointed to the Park Commission in 1890 from which he resigned to run for the Assembly a year later. When held ineligible for that post on a technicality, the Republicans nominated and elected him Mayor.

Dr. Curran was a trusted friend of George W. Aldridge who in 1891 had become chairman of the Executive Board and was increasingly being recognized as the Republican boss. When John Bauer, a skilled accountant engaged by the Council to investigate several city departments in 1891, uncovered numerous deficiencies and evidences of mismanagement, leading citizens launched a campaign for charter revision. The movement seemed harmless enough until Bauer, as chairman of a joint committee on the charter, drafted one to abolish the Executive Board and create a strong-mayor system. Mayor Curran displayed little interest in the movement, but Aldridge was very much concerned. When his first efforts to block its introduction at Albany failed, he decided himself to run for Mayor in 1894, thus bringing Curran's political career to an end and returning him to the practice of medicine in which he continued until his death in 1915.

GEORGE W. ALDRIDGE, the subject of many books, left a deep imprint on Rochester's history but not by his contributions as Mayor. Born in Michigan City, Indiana, in 1856, he grew up in Rochester and cast his first vote for Mayor Parsons in 1878 a year after his father's death. Young Aldridge inherited his father's contracting business as well as his interest in politics. Although defeated in his first bid for election to the Council, where his father had sat, he won a place on the most important Executive Board in 1883 and became its chairman in 1891. His astute handling of the city's patronage, both in jobs and contracts, brought stability to the party and assured his control,

enabling him to turn State Senator Parsons against the reform charter submitted by John Bauer's committee and to block its adoption. Whether Aldridge's decision to run for Mayor sprang from his fear of failure in this contest or from his desire to use the office as a stepping stone to a nomination for Lieutenant Governor, as the *Herald* charged, he did lose interest in the Mayor's modest responsibilities after blocking the charter, but missed out on the nomination. He welcomed an appointment as State Superintendent of Public Works in 1895 and promptly resigned as Mayor. Yet despite his departure, his influence continued and would prove dominant over most of the Mayors who followed until his death in 1922.

MERTON E. LEWIS, who completed Aldridge's term, was so patently an Aldridge man that he spurred the latent reform opposition to action. Born in suburban Webster and educated in its schools, he read law under James B. Perkins, was admitted to the Bar in 1887, and won election as an alderman from the Sixteenth Ward in 1890. Elected President of the Council in his third term, he was ready to stand in when Aldridge stepped out as Mayor in March 1895. Acting Mayor Lewis worked so closely with Aldridge that the reformers, who wished first of all to improve the schools and needed the Mayor's help in that effort, rallied in 1895 to found the Good Government League. Led by Joseph T. Alling, a civic-minded businessman, it organized clubs in every ward and formed a Committee of Sixty-Five to direct a campaign to elect a Mayor and other officials on a non-partisan basis. Although the Acting Mayor stood up valiantly to its attacks, Boss Aldridge decided that his legal talents would be more useful in the Assembly where he served two terms followed by one in the Senate and later as a deputy Attorney General. After several years residence in Albany and New York, he returned in 1925 to Rochester where he became for several years a special U. S. attorney and died at the age of 75 in 1937.

Greatly to the surprise of George Aldridge and his friends, the man he chose to succeed Lewis, Hiram H. Edgerton, was not elected Mayor in 1895 when for the first time the city election was held in November. The prize went instead to GEORGE E. WARNER, candidate of the Good Government League and endorsed by the Democratic Party. Born in Fair Haven, New York, in 1855 and brought to Rochester at a tender age by his father, a skilled carpenter, young Warner was educated in the city schools and studied law in a local office, winning admission to the Bar in 1877. In 1881 the Democrats elected him a municipal court judge, returning him to that office with increased majorities in 1887 and 1893. An early member of the Good Government League, he received its nomination for Mayor as well as that of his own party and won by a plurality of 500 votes.

Despite his victory, Warner faced an opposition party strongly entrenched in the Council as well as in the Board of Education and the Executive Board. Balked from effective leadership, he issued an unprecedented flood of vetoes and caustic messages, winning reelection in 1897 with a plurality of 5000 votes. When the Democrats, backed by the Good Government force, also captured control of the Council that year, Rochester expected at last to benefit from Warner's forthwright leadership. Unfortunately the alliance broke down in practice. While the Mayor continued to dispatch vetoes, his frustrated Good Government supporters worked out a compromise with Boss Aldridge securing his acceptance of educational and charter reforms that were adopted on a state-wide basis at Albany and his pledge of non-interference with the newer and smaller Board of Education and his promise to consult with the League on the selection of candidates for Mayor. As a result, when Warner ran again for Mayor on the Democratic tickets in 1899, 1901, and 1903, he lacked Good Government support and met defeat. Returning

to the practice of law, he lived to the age of 81 in 1937.

GEORGE A. CARNAHAN, elected in November 1899, was the last of the twenty Mayors of Rochester's midyears. Born in Ohio in 1862, he was not only one of the youngest, but the only one of that group who graduated from college. He was also the first to be chosen under the new charter, which abolished the Executive Board and consolidated most of its power in administrative officials to be named by the Mayor. Like his predecessor, a municipal judge and nominated with the approval of the Good Government leaders, he would face similar political challenges, but his powers to deal with them were greater and his story properly belongs with that of his successors of the next three decades.