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A History of Historical Writing in the Rochester Area

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Escape from the past is scarcely more possible for a community than for an individual. New growth is ever occurring, but generally as an outgrowth of vital traditions or latent capacities. Consciously or unconsciously we build upon the foundations of earlier generations, and at one time or another most of us find pleasure in consulting the chronicles and albums of our predecessors. If the community's tradition (its own story, its history) is then a part of its character, the history of its historiography is an important chapter in the story of its cultural development.

This is especially true of Rochester, where in each successive era fresh chroniclers have diligently reconstructed aspects of the city's past which had an especial interest to their contemporaries. The influence of national trends in historical scholarship frequently appeared, but local conditions determined the emphasis by providing the encouragement necessary to the completion and publication of successive studies. Expressive as they were of the culture of a city planted astride one of the main highways of American development, the Rochester historians occasionally focussed attention upon traditions and concepts which later gained wide prevalence among the scholarly fraternity.

Thus the first local historian, Henry O'Reilly, in supplying a book in 1838 which expressed Rochester's youthful confidence in its charac-

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ter as a center of the expanding economic and cultural strength of the new West, suggested or at least foreshadowed some of the significance which Frederick Jackson Turner later found in the *westward movement* and Arthur M. Schlesinger in the *city* as central features of American life. Rochester made early and fruitful contributions to the study of Indian antiquities. While Lewis H. Morgan's studies in this field launched the career of the father of American anthropology, thus diverting his attention from local history, later students have kept alive the area's interest in the Indian until finally a modern school of archaeologists has made noteworthy contributions. On the other hand, Orsamus Turner in 1851 made extensive use of the recent writings of the great national historian, George Bancroft, in providing a suitable historical setting for a city which by this time was ready to see itself in its hemispherical perspective. But Turner likewise supplied one of the earliest printed outlets for the reminiscences of individuals whose careers epitomized the struggles of the contemporary American. Later historians who specialized in this biographical field catered more knowingly to those ready to pay for the publication of personal sketches, nevertheless the voluminous literature of this school is full of significance to those seeking to interpret life in Rochester as in America at large during the second half of the 19th century.

The nation-wide movement for the creation of local historical societies, stimulated by the national centennial of 1876, did not bear fruit in Rochester for another dozen years. Meanwhile, the city's own semi-centennial provided an occasion for memorial histories whose numerous contributors were thus prepared to take an active part in the historical society founded in 1888. The appearance in Rochester as elsewhere during the nineties of a new interest in collecting Americana helped to maintain interest in the Society and to build up its archives. Many of the scholarly addresses delivered before the Society in these years ultimately found their way into print when the Society's membership, boosted by the patriotic fervor of the World War Years, provided adequate support. Finally, the appointment of an official City Historian in 1921 was a pioneer step in the present trend among municipalities to assume responsibility for the preservation and interpretation of their traditions.

Promotional History

Rochester's first historical interests were, significantly, the direct result of its extreme youth. Early travelers marvelled at the sudden appearance of a thriving town on a site recently covered by the virgin forest. Rochester was hailed as the most striking example of a new American phenomenon, the boom town. The details of the community's remarkable growth soon acquired a special value to local tavern keepers and stage drivers. Everard Peck's *Directory of the Village of Rochester*, issued in 1827, devoted nearly half of its 156 pages to a "Sketch of the History of the Village from 1812 to 1827," and a slightly enlarged edition of the sketch was printed separately a year later.¹ The hard times of 1829, checking that first boom, deferred the publication of a second *Directory* until 1834, the year in which Rochester acquired its first city charter. The revived spirits soon prompted a second and more voluble journalist, Henry O'Reilly, to assume the role of promotional historian.

Henry O'Reilly had had two prior contacts with Clio before he assumed the role of Rochester historian. As a youthful apprentice in New York, shortly after his arrival from Ireland, he had set type in 1817 on one of the early publications of the New York Historical Society. A copy of that volume, prized as a personal relic by the young printer, shows the wear of frequent handling. In 1830, during a brief respite as editor of the *Rochester Advertiser*, O'Reilly lived as a close neighbor and frequent visitor of Mary Jemison, the "White Woman of the Genesee," whose reminiscences then supplied the oldest records available on the area.² But it was as a journalist rather than historian that O'Reilly, back in Rochester after 1831, approached the city's history. His series of articles on "Rochester in 1835," which appeared in the *Advertiser* late that year, stirred sufficient interest to justify republication and prompted a second series a year later. "The cordiality with which the people of Rochester countenanced these scribblings," O'Reilly declared in the preface to his much more ambitious *Sketches of Rochester* which appeared early in 1838, "imboldened the writer to propose the present publication."

The 468 pages, "arranged by Henry O'Reilly" as he modestly phrased it, made a remarkable book. A self-trained journalist, 32

years of age, he tackled the new venture with more vigor than professional skill. Yet he would have found little help, had he sought it anywhere in the country, for western as well as urban history, his special interests, were unexplored subjects, while even local history had but a few scattered votaries. The study of history had not yet been included in any college curriculum, and only one volume of George Bancroft's famous *History of the United States* had so far appeared. Lacking a suitable model, O'Reilly revealed some of his own uncertainty as to the character of his book in the title which reads in part: *Settlement of the West. Sketches of Rochester; with Incidental Notices of Western New York*. In his preface he admits that "Some matters are included in this volume which may not be considered strictly relevant to the main purpose; but perhaps an excuse for their introduction here may be found in the circumstances that many of the facts concerning the settlement of western New York, are not readily accessible to the public." Thus, in effect, O'Reilly stumbled into the field of history when his journalistic researches turned up material which stirred his own imagination and the enthusiasm of his backers.

Indeed with a little dressing up, such as trimming the title and condensing the "Index" into a table of contents, the volume might pass today as a significant example of the "progressive" approach to history. The author began with a survey of his *present*, noting among other astonishing facts the community's unprecedented growth during the previous quarter century and its undoubted promise of further achievements. Having stirred his readers' interest, he significantly turned to "Climate, Soil, and Productions" for a second chapter, one loaded with statistical evidence. (Do we have here an economic historian, decades before the school appeared, or is the economic factor simply more logically primal than some have supposed?) A third chapter on "Geology" was contributed in large part by Professor Chester Dewey of the Rochester Collegiate Institute, Rochester's leading scientist; while the fourth chapter on "Medical Topography" was compiled from the writings of two pioneer doctors.

With these environmental factors in place, the Six Nations each in turn were ushered *out*, since that was how land titles in the area began. The territory was then subdivided by the various land companies and county boundaries established. Highways, canals, and railroads were next built and improved, which brought the author finally

back to his principal subject: "Statistics of Rochester," the title under which he proceeded in 140-odd pages to describe various aspects of the city's life during the previous two decades. No more comprehensive review of any American city then existed, but the tardy discovery of miscellaneous materials on Indians, the Erie Canal, Colonel Rochester, and other subjects prompted the inclusion of a lengthy appendix.

The assistance of Harpers' Brothers in New York was sought at the last moment by O'Reilly's local publisher, William Alling. John T. Young, a youthful Rochester artist, had prepared numerous drawings of local buildings and scenes, but satisfactory engravings of these and other views, 45 in all, could only be made in the New York shop of Alexander Anderson and John W. Orr. Years later Alling recalled how Everard Peck, the town's first historical editor, had cooperated to rush O'Reilly and his partly-printed volume to New York by sleigh in five days and nights in order to meet Harpers' publication schedule.⁸

The hasty compilation of this ambitious book within 15 months is, of course, evident in many details. Even the pagination became confused as one series of pages, numbered 337 to 388, had to be starred in order to distinguish them from others similarly numbered. Yet the merits are more remarkable than the slips, for this is the product of a youthful journalist responsible at the same time for the weekly issues of the *Republican*, a journalist whose researches were conducted in a city of less than 20,000 which did not yet boast a library (except the 400 volumes in the Athenaeum) or other aids to historical study.

O'Reilly, called back from his proofreading expedition to New York by an appointment as Rochester postmaster, found himself in an ideal position to observe reactions to his book. Agreeable notices were clipped from Buffalo, Syracuse, Albany, and even Boston papers. Letters of congratulation brought information concerning important manuscripts preserved by early settlers and land promoters. A week-end visit to Canandaigua, in response to an invitation to examine the papers of General Chapin, provided an opportunity as well to bring back the first volumes of James D. Bemis's *Ontario Repository* dating from 1803.

Plans for a more comprehensive volume on the "Settlement of Western New York" soon began to mature. Offers of assistance ar-

rived from George W. Clinton of Buffalo, Orsamus Turner then at Lockport, William H. C. Hosmer of Avon, and other enthusiastic readers. A young cousin of his wife, when asked to examine the archives of the New York Lyceum library, sent back notes on two books dealing with the West. A friendly offer to exchange publications arrived from Samuel G. Drake, one of the few writers on aboriginal history in that day. From the *North American Review* O'Reilly jotted down several references to pioneer books on Ohio and other items which indicated a growing awareness of the significance of the West.*

Unfortunately, much of the enthusiasm which had carried forward the work on his first book was quickly diverted into other channels. The pressure of detail at the postoffice, his responsibility as Democratic leader in the heated contest of 1840, and his duties as president of the recently organized Young Men's Association absorbed most of his time. In the latter capacity he did take the lead in staging the first Western New York Semi-Centennial, at Rochester in 1840, on which occasion the young Avon poet, Hosmer, read his "Ode in Commemoration of the First Settlement of Western New York." O'Reilly was too busy to comply with Freeman Hunt's request for an article on "The Flour Trade of Rochester," scheduled for the first issue of *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* in July, 1839; his plan for a Rochester edition of *The Life of Mary Jemison* was readily dropped when word arrived of a similar venture sponsored by another Rochester publisher; but he was instrumental, this time as president of the consolidated Athenaeum

*One of his clearest statements of this new viewpoint appeared in an undated letter to John Greig written probably during the early forties:

"My design covers the whole settlement of the country west of the settled line of the Revolution and will aim to show *how* it is that the wilderness has been reclaimed for social life and erected into independent political sovereignties. This is all a mystery to the old world, where they have no experience in such things; and is but faintly comprehended even by many among ourselves: And if the *decline and fall* of empires are so instructive or interesting, may we not hope that the *Rise and Progress of Free States* from the thickness of the wilderness, may have some interest and instruction in other lands as well as this? I am not very vain of *my capacity* for executing the work; but *it is a work such as does not now exist*, and such a one as . . . may present the Progress of our Race and the Condition of our Country in a *light* and with a degree of *accuracy* that will measurably atone for any deficiencies of eloquence in the language with which it is couched. I aim to make it a book that will not only render justice to the *Early Settlers* and to the Projectors of Improvements westward, from Washington downwards to the close of the *First-Half-Century of the Federal Constitution*,—on which Constitution and on free institutions generally I mean to present this picture of Progress as the best *practical commentary*." O'Reilly Doc. No. 757.

and Young Men's Association, in bringing Gabriel Furman from New York to lecture on the early discovery of America. Whether or not the account of that address which appeared in the *Advertiser*, O'Reilly's old paper, was by his hand, it is significant to note that the reporter, after noting Furman's claims for the Norsemen, quoted two lengthy paragraphs disparaging such views from Bancroft's first volume, now apparently available in the Athenaeum library.

O'Reilly's later historical career is a record of tantalizing projects, none of them completed by himself. His contribution to the work of succeeding historians in Rochester will be noted below, but here we must glance at some of his other ambitious ventures. Shortly after removing to Albany in 1843, O'Reilly had an opportunity during a temporary break in employment to survey the mass of papers on Federal Indian affairs which he had collected from General Chapin's heirs. At his suggestion a move was launched to persuade Congress to appropriate funds for the publication of these and similar papers on Indian tribes, but when the Secretary of War did finally act in this matter, three years later, O'Reilly was already engaged in his telegraph venture, and Henry R. Schoolcraft received the appointment.⁴ While that project was still hanging fire, O'Reilly acquired possession of James Monroe's papers with the intention of writing a biography of the former President; this time Congress acted promptly, purchasing the collection for the Library of Congress. Under slightly different circumstances O'Reilly almost became the author of a "History of the Telegraph" in 1855 and the biographer of his late friend Gerrit Smith in 1876, but again both tasks fell to other men. A chapter was written on "The History of Agriculture in New York State"; several brief contributions appeared in the *Historical Magazine* during the late sixties; a proposed new edition of the *Sketches of Rochester*, to be carried down to date in two volumes, was twice considered seriously by Rochester publishers but postponed by the author; and both O'Reilly's "Memories of a Half Century" projected in 1870, and his oft-contemplated essay on "The March of Empire Across the Continent with the aid of the Immigrant" failed to reach completion.

An active member of the New York Historical Society, and an honorary member of four similar societies, O'Reilly continued an intermittent correspondence with Benson J. Lossing among other his-

torians, painstakingly copied his own documents for deposit in various historical libraries, and early advocated a national historical society. Unfortunately his name does not appear among the founders of the American Historical Association in 1884, and he died a broken old man at St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester two years later.¹⁶ But if O'Reilly outlived his historical productivity, we cannot dismiss him yet, for his far-reaching influence appears in the work of most of his successors in the field of Rochester's history.

Indian and Pioneer Antiquities

The enthusiasm for local history, which had provided early encouragement to O'Reilly, continued to animate Rochester for at least a quarter century following his departure. A brilliant young lawyer, Isaac R. Elwood, was reported in the early forties to be compiling a new history of Rochester in order to stimulate trade. O'Reilly wrote to urge him to tackle the "History of the Democratic Party in Western New York," perhaps with the same motive in mind. This, however, is the last we hear of promotional history, for Indian lore and pioneer reminiscences were fast gaining precedence.

Local interest in Indian traditions did not lead immediately to historical scholarship in Rochester. Attention and support was given, instead, to the work of W. H. C. Hosmer of Avon, whose "Yonondio" or "The Warriors of the Genesee," when published in 1844, stirred area pride and caused his name to be coupled with those of Irving and Cooper (with some justification on regional if not literary grounds). Indeed Hosmer, through numerous poems on the Indian or the pioneer and by frequent addresses before Rochester and other western lyceums, reached a wide audience.⁵ Meanwhile, the Indian biographies of William Leet Stone, editor of the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, opened new vistas to up-state historians. Stone was a welcome visitor in Rochester where his *Life of Joseph Brant* in 1838 and his *Lives of Red Jacket and Cornplanter* in 1841 attracted greater favor than was accorded them further east.⁶

Rochester was in fact the center of a curious revival of Indian traditions in the mid-forties. Lewis Henry Morgan, a young lawyer recently arrived from Aurora, where he had been active in a young men's secret society, organized "The Grand Order of the Iroquois"

among his new friends in Rochester. The ritual, based on Indian folk lore, spurred investigation into these mysteries. When a young Seneca from the Tonawanda Reservation, Ely S. Parker, joined the society, the make-believe quickly became a serious scholarly interest for Morgan. Despite a growing legal practice, Morgan diligently transcribed with Parker's aid the various Indian traditions previously handed down by word of mouth, thus accumulating the material for his great book on *The League of the Iroquois*. Only one chapter of this two-volume work, published in 1851, was devoted to history, for Morgan was chiefly interested in the forms and functions of Indian life. His major contribution was to be in the unexplored field of anthropology, yet at the time he still thought of himself as an historian and eagerly sought the opinions of fellow students of Indian antiquities.⁷ It is not surprising to see Morgan as one of the half-dozen Rochesterians who joined to found an historical society in 1861, naming O'Reilly as honorary president. Unfortunately the war and the absence from the city of the most active sponsors brought the society to an early end.⁸

Rochester already had an historical society of a sort in the Pioneer Association formed in 1847. The organization was an outgrowth of a Pioneer Jubilee, held in the Blossom Hotel, at which 61 residents of Rochester in 1818 gathered to exchange reminiscences. Similar jubilees convened in succeeding years, and the extended newspaper reports of the recollections of these pioneers soon constituted a valuable source, useful despite numerous inconsistencies. So much enthusiasm was engendered by these jubilees that pressure developed to broaden their scope, thus prompting the organization in 1850 of the Pioneer Association of Western New York. The banquet that year featured an historical address by Orsamus Turner, already acclaimed O'Reilly's successor as historian of western New York.⁹

Though five years the elder, Turner may properly be considered O'Reilly's student, a student privileged to realize some of his master's ambitions. Son of a Genesee pioneer, Orsamus Turner was first attracted to historical research by the publication of O'Reilly's *Sketches of Rochester*. A fellow Democrat and journalist, he volunteered in 1839 to help collect pioneer reminiscences for O'Reilly's projected volume on the "Settlement of Western New York." The task proved so agreeable that, after O'Reilly's removal to Albany, Turner wrote to

enquire whether a biography of Joseph Ellicott, land agent of the Holland Companies, would embarrass O'Reilly's plans. The latter eventually sent the desired encouragement and generously loaned several boxes of documents,¹⁰ materials which doubtless helped to transform the contemplated biography into the more ambitious *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York*, published at Buffalo in 1849.

Significant new influences appear in this volume and in the subsequent *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris' Reserve*. The early scholarship of O'Reilly and his contemporaries had rested almost exclusively on local documents and verbal reports. Turner, a decade later, enjoyed the assistance of a score or more of scholarly volumes which disclosed new horizons. A stimulating lecture by Orsamus H. Marshall before the Buffalo Young Men's Association in 1847 directed Turner's attention to early French activities in western New York. Marshall, Buffalo's ablest scholar of the day, graciously loaned unpublished translations of important French accounts and welcomed Turner to his choice library. There, among other works of interest, were found an English translation of Charlevoix's famous *History of New France*, Bancroft's early volumes, Stone's Indian biographies, the writings of W. H. C. Hosmer, the two-volume *Conquest of Canada* (by G. D. Warburton, whose earlier attack on the States prompted anonymity), and E. B. O'Callaghan's four-volume *Documentary History of the State of New York*. With these materials at hand, Turner was able to place the settlement of the Holland Purchase, and later that of Phelps and Gorham, in their proper historic setting.

Turner, in his *Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, after surveying in some detail the French occupation and the British struggle for dominance, included a chapter on the Indians by W. H. C. Hosmer before proceeding to tackle his major subject, the white settlement of the area. Here the rapidly accumulating mass of pioneer reminiscences supplied a rich fund of detail to which the author added lengthy quotations from the numerous British travel journals then flooding the market. Indeed the major defect of Turner's work sprang from the overabundance of materials which he could neither digest nor exclude. The result was a compromise between an historical treatise and a compila-

tion of documents. Two editions of *Phelps and Gorham's Purchase* were found necessary, the first printed in 1851 with a Supplement of 132 pages supplying additional material on Monroe County, and the second issued a year later with its 96-page Supplement devoted to five other area counties. Despite his total of 720 pages (excluding duplications) in the two editions, Turner's account did not come down much beyond the year 1815, though some notices respecting the canal and the settlement of new canal towns carried beyond that date.

Again, only a journalist would have tackled the job of compiling three such books in four years crowded with other responsibilities. Little opportunity existed for literary craftsmanship or scholarly evaluation of the records at hand, yet these volumes stand today as an invaluable portion of the historical literature on western New York. Turner, however, considerably overestimated the demand for information on the area's antiquities, for a large stock of his books remained a drug on the market until, years later, a fire consumed a portion of the publisher's store. The 1500 copies of O'Reilly's book had, on the other hand, quickly sold out, despite the hard times of the late thirties. Turner, discouraged by the poor sales, resumed his newspaper work in 1852 and returned to Lockport two years later, where his career was unfortunately cut short by death in 1855.

Meanwhile, the Rochester pioneers continued to rally at annual jubilees. In 1854, sixteen pioneer women were welcomed to the banquet, at which copies of John Kelsey's *Lives and Reminiscences of the Pioneers of Rochester*¹² were distributed. That booklet contained 68 brief sketches of those early settlers whose portraits had already been hung as a Pioneer Gallery in Kelsey's Emporium of Art, to which the aging pioneers shortly adjourned behind an old-fashioned fife and drum. A Junior Pioneer Association was formed the next year, and in 1857 Jarvis M. Hatch, a former editorial associate of Orsamus Turner, became chairman of the committee on records. A local publisher was negotiating with O'Reilly for a second volume on the history of Rochester, and the committee undertook to assemble the new data already available on the pioneers of the area. The lengthy summary prepared by Jarvis Hatch filled a large size record book, which ultimately found its way into the Athenaeum Library, together with a miscellaneous assortment of Indian and pioneer relics and the reminiscent notes of the

482 pioneers who registered with one or the other of these two societies prior to their dissolution in 1875.¹⁸

Perhaps the most voluble of these pioneers was Edwin Scrantom, who had arrived as a lad with the first family to settle permanently on the Hundred Acre Tract. Scrantom's first published reminiscences appeared on May 1, 1852, the fortieth anniversary of his arrival, and a decade later he resumed the task of pioneer annalist by launching a series of Old Citizen Letters. A total of 172 numbered letters, varying from one to three columns in length, appeared in this series, which continued until 1879, a year before Scrantom's death. Despite innumerable repetitions and inconsistencies, the intermittent flow of his reminiscences of things past supplied a popular taste for strange novelties.¹⁹

Younger men were assuming control of community affairs, men whose memories did not reach back to pioneer days. Thus in 1860 when young George W. Fisher and George G. Cooper, editors of the *Union and Advertiser*, stumbled on a copy of the village *Directory*, its historical account proved so astonishing that they printed it in full as "The Early History of Rochester, 1810-1827" in successive issues of their paper, adding some notes on the remarkable contrasts between the village of 1827 and the city of 1860. Popular interest was sufficient to prompt a reissue of these articles as a separate pamphlet for wider distribution.

Historical Anniversaries

By the mid-seventies, however, Rochester's historical activity reached a low ebb, just when that of the nation at large was experiencing a revival. The ranks of the local pioneers had thinned, and their jubilees were finally suspended. The records they had assembled were deposited for safe-keeping with the Athenaeum, but that institution, heavily in debt, was at last forced to close its library and turn its books and other possessions over to Mortimer F. Reynolds, the chief creditor. Meanwhile, the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia was stimulating a wide-spread movement for the preservation of local history. Societies were established in nearby Livingston and Cayuga Counties,¹⁵ and Monroe was one among several western New York counties (not to mention scores throughout the country) for which memorial histories were published by a Philadelphia firm. Yet Rochester did not respond

with enthusiasm, nor did local historical research revive until the approach of the city's own semi-centennial in 1884.

The *History of Monroe County, New York*, published at Philadelphia in 1877, was compiled by Professor W. H. McIntosh, one of the staff historians employed to write a series of memorial histories throughout the country. McIntosh, busy at the same time with volumes on nearby Wayne and Ontario Counties, turned out a standardized account, profusely illustrated by nearly two hundred portraits and residences of those citizens willing to pay for the inclusion of autobiographical notices. Apparently Edwin Scrantom was the chief local consultant, though the final product revealed none of the warm color of his reminiscent accounts. The book, despite an abundance of detail, full lists of officials, and convenient summaries of town and institutional history, failed to strike a responsive chord. The lively enthusiasm for research manifest by the historical societies in Livingston and Cayuga Counties and in the city of Buffalo, to mention only the nearest neighbors, was lacking in Rochester. Perhaps it was the season for changing the guard.

A new generation of historians was in fact on the threshold. A former Rochesterian, George H. Harris, back in the city after a varied career, became superintendent of the Reynolds Arcade in 1877, thus acquiring responsibility on the side for the books and other collections of the old Athenaeum with which Mortimer F. Reynolds contemplated establishing an endowed library. Long evenings spent among these treasures during the absence of his family that winter stirred Harris's latent historical interest, and his first articles on Indian antiquities began to appear in 1879. Harris soon became engaged in an active correspondence with O. H. Marshall in Buffalo, General John S. Clark in Auburn, and George G. Conover in Geneva, among other area scholars interested in varied phases of the early history of western New York.¹⁶ A healthy stimulus to painstaking accuracy resulted, thus supplying some of the discipline which these unschooled (except for Marshall) scholars developed to a higher degree than many of their predecessors.

Harris chose for a special field the aboriginal history of western New York. Honored as Ho-tar-shan-nyooh, "The Pathfinder," by his Seneca friends, Harris spent many hours exploring faintly marked

routes and digging into hilltop sites reported to contain Indian relics. He was equally diligent in perusing the increasingly abundant literature in American and Canadian publications. Invitations to address the Livingston County Historical Society, the Wyoming Pioneer's Association at Silver Lake, and several Rochester societies, prompted him to gather his miscellaneous discoveries into systematic papers. In 1882, when William F. Peck, an experienced editor, projected his *Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester*, Harris was the logical authority to write the first fifteen chapters on the city's Indian and French antecedents.¹⁷

William Farley Peck, son of Everard Peck (noted above), was the first Rochester historian (if we exclude Lewis H. Morgan, not strictly an historian) who enjoyed any academic training. After one year at the University of Rochester he had transferred to Williams where he graduated in 1861. Yet his approach to history, like that of most of his predecessors, was through journalism, for after a few years in a law office he had turned to the newspaper field, serving in various editorial capacities on several papers prior to his retirement in 1882 to devote his full time to the projected *Semi-Centennial*.¹⁸

Peck's 736-page volume was the most solid contribution yet made to the city's history. While somewhat pedestrian in style, weighted with detail and lacking either emphasis or interpretation, the book nevertheless presented a mass of information in a systematic fashion. In addition to the fifteen chapters contributed by Harris, twenty-two of the remaining forty chapters were largely prepared by other selected authorities. Yet the major portion of the volume, which included 185 pages devoted to 36 of Rochester's outstanding men, chosen by the editor, was the work of William F. Peck and stands as a worthy memorial to his scholarship.

No city with as active an historical tradition as Rochester enjoyed could face its semi-centennial lightly. Not only was an elaborate celebration staged on June 8, 9, and 10, 1884, but when, late in February, it became apparent that Peck's history would not be ready for distribution until fall, a rival volume was impulsively undertaken and carried to completion by Jane Marsh Parker in three hectic months.¹⁹ It could scarcely be expected that *Rochester, A Story Historical*, prepared under such stress, would make a contribution to historical knowledge, yet it

did present some old material in a fresh and sprightly fashion, getting it across to many who would not have the patience to plod through Peck's volume. Mrs. Parker had the advantage of approaching her subject with a chip on her shoulder. As a young girl she had suffered under the austere religious regulations of a father who had confidently expected the end of the world in 1844, and as a result she was both able and in a mood to throw more light on "the Isms Charge" and other episodes than could be expected from her sober rivals. Her book is still interesting reading.

The organization of a Rochester historical society was frequently suggested at this time, yet the rival factions could not get together. Both Mrs. Parker and William F. Peck had sought and received co-operation from Henry O'Reilly, but when O'Reilly returned to Rochester in 1885, feeble health rendered him incapable of supplying the necessary leadership. It remained for Mrs. Gilman H. Perkins, daughter of one of Rochester's early business leaders and wife of a prominent lawyer, to take the initiative by inviting leaders of the city's cultural life into her spacious home on East Avenue to hear an enthusiastic report of a recent visit to the Buffalo Historical Society. It was agreed that the prospect for future historical research in Rochester rested upon the collection and preservation of local materials. The new Reynolds Library had been opened two years before, but its larger responsibilities left to others the task of collecting sources necessary for the study of local history.²⁰

The Rochester Historical Society was accordingly organized early in March, 1888, primarily to perform this function. Dr. Edward Mott Moore, a civic-minded physician who had written one of the chapters of Peck's volume, was chosen president; Peck himself became recording secretary, while Mrs. Parker was named corresponding secretary. The latter supplied the largest flow of reports and papers during the first decade, though both Harris and Peck among others contributed their share. Great stimulus and profit was derived in the nineties from the annual visits of Frank H. Severance, the scholarly editor of the Buffalo Historical Society *Publications*, whose own researches into the history of the Niagara frontier were raising new standards.

An interesting evidence of the new professional approach resulted from the appointment of Professor William P. Morey of the Univer-

sity of Rochester as chairman of the committee on papers. Under his direction an elaborate chart was drawn up, listing the various aspects of the city's history and assigning topics to different members. The device is suggestive of the German seminar method, then but recently introduced in a few American universities. It is pertinent in this connection to note that the first appearance of an American history course in the Rochester Free Academy, the city High School, occurred in 1888. Professor Morey's "Constitutional and Political History of the United States" had initiated work in American history at the University a year earlier, and in 1890 a "Seminary in American History" was scheduled for honor students. Such was the favor of these courses that a Senior Historical Club was formed at the University in 1892.

Professor Morey's own research was in the field of ancient history, and his chief contribution to local history was through his services as teacher and, notably, as a member of the Reynolds Library board in which capacity he helped to develop resources for later historical study. But another and younger university professor who appeared just at this time, Herman LeRoy Fairchild, was destined to make a valuable contribution to local history. Fairchild's field was geology, a subject which, because of the many curious geological features in the area, had intensely interested most students of Rochester from the earliest days. After much wild speculation, even by such an able scientist as Chester Dewey, a scholar had at last arrived whose careful articles, starting in 1895 and numbering 45 by 1931, supplied both an authoritative and an illuminating explanation of the city's geographical environment.²¹

Several additional contributors to local history were enlisted through the efforts of the Society. An able lawyer, Howard L. Osgood, whose choice collection of Americana was then perhaps the best in Rochester, became especially interested in the French and Indian period. After the death of George Harris in 1893, Osgood emerged as the chief local authority in this field. His frequent and delightful addresses before the Society contributed much to its life, while his manuscript collections, when acquired after his death in 1909, made a permanent contribution.²² Jesse W. Hatch, a pioneer shoe merchant and manufacturer, read several excellent papers. A prominent journalist, Charles E. Fitch, and a young lawyer, Nathaniel S. Olds, took up the work of

popularizing local history after Mrs. Parker left the city in the mid-nineties. Before we drop the latter author, whose hundreds of fictional and religious articles and many books had won a national audience, it is interesting to note that among her historical papers was a discussion of the *Jesuit Relations* as source material. This discovery had been made elsewhere several decades before, but only as the library facilities in Rochester improved during the nineties did copies of Shea's translation become available. Mrs. Parker's notice of the *Relations* came at a fortuitous moment, just as plans for a new and more comprehensive edition were maturing in Wisconsin. Mrs. Parker was in fact invited to become the editorial assistant of Reuben G. Thwaites in 1895, but the pair were, to state it mildly, poorly matched, and Mrs. Parker soon packed her bags and left for California.²³

While historical scholarship was for a time directed chiefly towards the collection of materials and the preparation of papers for the Society's monthly meetings, varied historical publications were produced. Perhaps the most excellent was the small volume issued by the Rochester Historical Society in 1892.²⁴ A half dozen of the best papers read before the Society were included in its 128 pages, a publication of high scholarly merit. A much larger tome was brought out three years later by the Boston History Company under the title *Landmarks of Monroe County, New York*. One L. C. Aldrich was apparently the staff historian responsible for more than two-thirds of this 700-page volume which presented over one thousand biographical sketches of citizens ready to pay for this attention. This distinction would have been slight had the publishers not persuaded William F. Peck to write a summary history of the city and county to give a worthy setting for the biographies.

Peck was reluctantly persuaded to perform that service at this time and again in 1908 for the two-volume *History of Rochester and Monroe County*, issued in 1,434 folio size pages by a New York publisher. The winning argument was that, if he did not cooperate, another and perhaps less creditable account would be palmed off on the gullible citizenry. Yet the ready market for commercially sponsored biographical collections (four other voluminous publications appeared locally during these years) demonstrated a persistent and human interest in community history, closely similar to the staunch family

loyalties which prompted an increasing number of individuals to search diligently for missing genealogical details concerning their private family trees. Community and family loyalties had become a prominent characteristic of social life in Rochester by the early part of the twentieth century.

The biographical emphasis may have accounted for the marked decline in strictly historical scholarship during the early 1900's. Most of the old scholars were passing. William H. Samson, editor of the *Post Express*, gradually found himself a lonely remnant of the old guard by 1910, and a year later he likewise left Rochester. Some real work was accomplished, nevertheless, during that first decade, chiefly through Samson's stimulus. His "Studies in Local History," which appeared intermittently in the *Post Express* from January 1907 until December 1912, achieved a fine balance between scholarly and popular standards. Choice passages on Rochester from rare old books were quoted at length in these "Studies"; hearty notes of praise and occasional criticisms greeted new historical publications touching on western New York; several of the best addresses before the Rochester Historical Society were printed in full, and lengthy articles by Nathaniel S. Olds, Rear-Admiral Franklin S. Hanford, and other area writers were run as serials; yet most of the 140 articles represented Samson's own researches. Before his departure for New York in 1911, Samson's manuscript files and his careful transcription of rare books and documents in numerous notebooks constituted a prize collection, one which the Rochester Historical Society was fortunately able to purchase in order to prevent its loss to the city.²⁵

Most of the older historians had died, but a few such as Mrs. Parker, Charles E. Fitch, and William H. Samson left for greener pastures. Rochester was failing to keep pace with other communities as a book and library center. Several native sons with historical interests chose to pursue their scholarly labors in more congenial climes. Perhaps the ablest of these was James Breck Perkins, a graduate of the University of Rochester in 1867, whose career as a lawyer and politician culminated in his election to Congress in 1900 and successively until his death in 1910. His historical career had come earlier, beginning in the mid-eighties when he went to Paris to seek materials for several books on the relatively obscure 17th and 18th centuries of

French history. His volumes, based on a careful study of a wide range of French writers, were chiefly valuable because of their breadth of scope and lucid style, attracting readers in America not conversant with French.²⁶

Among other Rochesterians who found historical subjects elsewhere, Rossiter Johnson and Edward Hungerford deserve notice. The former was an indefatigable editor of materials closely related to history, though on the popular side. He wrote numerous journalistic summaries on scattered historical subjects, and one fairly popular novel based on his own boyhood in Rochester. His address on the latter subject to the Rochester Historical Society well merited inclusion in the Society's publications.²⁷ In similar fashion the historical writings of Edward Hungerford followed the close of his journalistic career in Rochester. Again the volumes were written for a popular rather than a scholarly audience, achieving a circulation which greatly exceeded that of all other Rochester historians. Some of Hungerford's railroad history relates directly to the Rochester area,²⁸ and we shall note below his contribution to the Rochester Centennial in 1934.

An Era of Specialization

The declining interest in Rochester's history was effectively checked in 1914. As the upturn came early in the year, it can hardly be attributed to the World War, though the revived enthusiasm for American traditions stimulated by that struggle definitely helped to sustain the new surge of historical research in Rochester. Much credit for the launching and direction of this movement during the next quarter-century must go to Edward R. Foreman who, as president of the Society from 1914 to 1918 and as City Historian from 1921 until his death in 1936, both supplied much of the leadership and performed a major part of the scholarly work involved. Valuable support came from many associates, among them Elmer Adler and Charles H. Wiltse whose contributions to the Society's growth from a struggling group of antiquarians into an effective organization of more than 800 dues-paying members paved the way for the active publication program launched in 1922. Of equal if not greater importance was the city's decision in 1912 to open and maintain a Public Library of which the Historical Society's library became the Division of History. The col-

lection and servicing of local historical materials thus at last gained public support, facilitating an increased output of historical scholarship.

The revived scholarly activity was quickly evident in a succession of able papers read before the Society. The values of specialization suggested by Professor Morey two decades before were now realized. Not only did Professor Fairchild present the fruits of his research on geologic backgrounds, but Dr. Augustus H. Strong of the Theological Seminary read several papers on early Rochester personalities, Richard H. Lansing reconstructed the history of music in Rochester, and A. Emerson Babcock delved into the early history of the town of Brighton, to mention but a few of the early contributors.²⁹

Renewed support from outside the city was enjoyed in these years as Severance visited again from Buffalo and the recently appointed State Historian, Dr. James Sullivan, addressed the Society on frequent occasions. Two historians at the University of Syracuse, specialists in New York State history, Dr. Paul D. Evans and Dr. Alexander C. Flick, read stimulating papers, and the State Archaeologist, Arthur C. Parker, destined in 1924 to become the Director of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, arrived in 1916 to deliver his first address in Rochester on "The Historic and Prehistoric Indians of Western New York." Robert W. G. Vail of the American Antiquarian Society (now the New York State Librarian) contributed numerous choice items, and Douglas C. McMurtrie of Chicago cooperated with Foreman and Donald Gilchrist, University of Rochester librarian, in the preparation of a "Check List of Rochester Publications, 1816-1860," issued in the Society's fifth volume. The visit of the American Historical Association to Rochester for its annual convention in 1926 provided a healthy stimulus to local scholars.

American participation in the war gave birth to a desire for the preservation of local war service records. Spurred by this widespread interest, a law authorizing the appointment of local historians was adopted at Albany. Rochester was, in 1921, one of the first communities to appoint a City Historian, and in no other city was the work of collecting and editing the records of local participation in the war so vigorously and successfully pressed forward. Three huge volumes, totalling 3,300 pages, were issued during the succeeding nine years.³⁰

The first volume presented biographical sketches of each of the men from Rochester and Monroe County who had made the supreme sacrifice. Volume II listed the 20,211 service men and 3,061 civilians active with the combat forces, giving their full service records. The final volume comprised a series of reports of the activities of local organizations and agencies in support of the war, thus completing a printed memorial to the community's war effort that afforded personal gratification to the many thousands directly touched by that great conflict.

While this work was in progress the Historical Society launched its publication program. Under the editorship of Edward R. Foreman, nine annual volumes were issued, presenting many of the abler papers read before the Society in these and earlier years. Several among the new contributors deserve special notice: Major Wheeler C. Case for numerous contributions, Walter H. Cassebeer for studies of local architecture, Dr. Betsy C. Corner for medical history, Miss Amy H. Croughton for articles on social life, Mrs. Emma Pollard Greer for the history of Charlotte, Judge John D. Lynn for contributions to legal history, Miss Maude Motley for a history of the important flour industry, the Reverend Orlo J. Price for articles on Protestant church history, George B. Selden for studies of the French invasion, Morley B. Turpin for biographical studies of Rochester's pioneer miller, and W. Earl Weller for his contributions to a history of the city charter.

Most of these writers are still living and with others are continuing the study of their chosen subjects. Some, who likewise belong in the above list, deserve separate mention for their work issued independently of the Society: Clement G. Lanni for several vivid books on Rochester politics during the Aldridge era, Herman Pfaefflin for his *Hundertjahrige Geschichte des Deutschums von Rochester* published at Rochester in 1915, Alexander M. Stewart for numerous contributions on the Jesuits in this area, and the Reverend Frederick J. Zwierlein for his *Life and Letters of Bishop McQuaid, prefaced with the History of Catholic Rochester before his Episcopate*, a three-volume work of solid scholarship. Numerous church and other institutional histories, prompted by an anniversary or some other occasion, appeared with increased frequency during these years, so much so that their number prohibits listing here.

As the city itself approached its centennial in the early thirties,

Edward R. Foreman took the lead in planning an adequate celebration. A four-volume *Centennial History of Rochester* was projected and issued jointly by the City and the Society. Many of the above mentioned writers here gained an opportunity to draw their researches together, taking advantage of newly discovered data under Foreman's editorial guidance. While these volumes appeared annually between 1931 and 1934, the official celebration occurred in the latter year, featuring a pageant, "Pathways of Progress," written by Edward Hungerford. Many thousands attended one or more of the daily performances staged between August 11 and September 9; more thousands visited the elaborate displays on view in the Centennial Exposition at Edgerton Park.³¹

New Trends

An important era of Rochester's historiography closed with the death of Edward R. Foreman early in 1936. His editorial leadership, noted in part above, and his numerous articles on a variety of subjects achieved new standards of critical scholarship. He was the first major student of Rochester's history whose training included not only editorial experience but academic instruction in history. Many of those spurred to the study of local history by his enthusiasm were likewise professionally trained, and it accordingly appeared logical in 1936 for the Board of Directors of the Public Library to turn to the University for a trained historian, Professor Dexter Perkins, as successor to Foreman. The almost simultaneous completion of the new Public Library building permitted the consolidation of the historical collections of the old Reynolds Library with those of the Public Library and the Historical Society. A trained librarian, Miss Emma Swift, was placed in charge of a Local History Division equipped for larger service.

This is scarcely the place to review the scholarly contributions of the past eight years, yet it may be appropriate to note in conclusion some new trends. This quarterly, *Rochester History*, established in 1939 to supply brief, popularly written but informative accounts of varied aspects of the city's history, is designed to fill the needs of curious visitors as well as interested citizens too busy to tackle the heavier tomes. A growing desire for materials fitted to schoolroom use prompted the preparation of several pamphlets for that purpose, and *A Story of Rochester* has been published for use in the fourth grade. The

Rochester Historical Society has continued its annual publication program, issuing since 1935 a comprehensive index and seven volumes presenting valuable documentary or scholarly articles. Much regional lore is available in *Rochester and Monroe County*, a volume in the American Guide Series prepared by the WPA Writers Project. The modern trend towards a study of urban history has spurred the present writer, as Assistant City Historian, to undertake a new synthesis of the community's history, one which will attempt to see it whole — as a unit which has not merely its own historic antecedents but its ever changing national environment. The mass of evidence already collected by varied specialists will greatly facilitate this work, which may in turn suggest new research opportunities.

Indeed, local historical scholarship, while at present somewhat restricted by the necessary preoccupation with World War II, already suggests the emergence of fresh slants. New acquisitions at the University library, as well as by the Public Library, will greatly facilitate such study. Most of the research projects of the several trained historians on the various faculties in the city relate to subjects distant from Rochester, but the work of Dr. Glyndon G. Van Deusen on Thurlow Weed has made important contributions to the early history of this community. The archeological researches of the scientific expeditions sent out by the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences have borne fruit in an excellent study now in press by Dr. William A. Ritchie. *Mount Allegro*, a fascinating report of life in a Rochester Sicilian colony, *A River Ramble*, rich in the folk-lore of the Genesee Valley, and a little book on *Cobblestone Architecture* are three among several contributions which demonstrate the fertility of the local field. At least a half-dozen historical studies are now in progress or await publication. The post-war years promise to open new vistas here as in so many other aspects of the community's life.

NOTES

1. The "Sketch" was later attributed to two pioneer settlers: Jesse Hawley, who wrote the section on Monroe County, and Elisha Ely who supplied the material on Rochester. The 1828 edition added fourteen new pages.
2. Mary Jemison's narrative, taken down by James E. Seaver of Batavia in November, 1823, and first printed by J. D. Bemis at Canandaigua in 1824, had already appeared in second and third editions by English publishers; see the "Tabulation of [27] Editions and Issues of *The Life of Mary Jemison*" in F. Strecker, *My First Year as a Jemisonian* (Booklet, Rochester, 1931).

3. This account of O'Reilly's career as an historian is based on his voluminous papers in the Roch. Hist. Soc., and in the N. Y. Hist. Soc. *See also*, Sister Miriam Monaghan's "Henry O'Reilly: Journalist and Promoter of the Telegraph," an MS thesis prepared at the Catholic Univ. of America.
4. It is well to note here that although O'Reilly changed the spelling of his name to O'Rielly after he left Rochester, we will continue to employ the Rochester spelling.
5. *The Poetical Works of William H. C. Hosmer* (New York, Redfield, 1854), 2 vol.; *Later Lays and Lyrics* (Rochester, 1873); *Nat. Cyc. of Amer. Biog.* VIII: 200.
6. William L. Stone kept journals of two visits to western New York; *see* Buffalo Hist. Soc. *Publications* XIV: 207-264; Samson's "Studies in Local History," Nos. 62-74, Scrapbook, Roch. Hist. Soc. *See also* Wm. L. Stone, *Life and Times of Red Jacket* (Albany, 1866), for information on Stone, Sr., by his son.
7. L. H. Morgan Papers, Univ. of Rochester; *see also* C. A. Dewey, "Sketch of the Life of Lewis H. Morgan with Personal Reminiscences" R.H.S., *Pub.* II: 29-46.
8. E. R. Foreman, "The Origin and Mission of the Rochester Historical Society," R.H.S., *Pub.* I: 9-10.
9. Pioneer Association, "Minute Book of the Steering Committee," *also* "Scrapbook," Roch. Hist. Soc.
10. Morley B. Turpin "Orsamus Turner," R. H. S., *Pub.* XVII: 273-290; O'Reilly Doc. 359a, 853.
11. Turpin, *loc. cit.*; *see also* Turner's prefaces in both books.
12. Published at Rochester, 1854.
13. Pioneer Assoc. "Minute Book"; Junior Pioneer Association, "Records of the Committee on Historical Collections," MS, Roch. Hist. Soc.
14. Edwin Scramton, "Old Citizen Letters" Scrapbook, Roch. Hist. Soc.; Harriett J. Naylor, "And This Was Rochester! Excerpts From The Old Citizen Letters," *Rochester History*, Jan. 1942.
15. O'Reilly Doc. 1357, 1358; Cayuga Co. Hist. Soc., *Collections* IV: 45-55.
16. Harris Manuscripts, *also* Scrapbook, Roch. Hist. Soc.
17. J. G. D. Oliver, "A Memorial of George H. Harris," Rochester Academy of Science *Proceedings*, II: 224-230, contains a bibliography of his writings. *William Farley Peck* (Rochester, 1909).
18. Marcelle Le Menager, "Life and Work of Jane Marsh Parker, 1836-1913," MS thesis prepared at George Washington Univ.
19. Foreman, *loc. cit.*, pp. 10-14; B. McKelvey, "The Historical Society Library," R.H.S., *Pub.* XVI: 179-184.
21. *See* the list of Prof. Fairchild's publications in R. H. S., *Pub.* X: 102-104.
22. Wm. H. Samson, Note Books X: 292-310, gives a catalogue of Osgood's collections.
23. Le Menager, *op. cit.*
24. *Publications of the Rochester Historical Society* (Rochester, 1892). This is marked Vol. I, but should not be confused with the R. H. S. *Publication Fund Series I* (1922).
25. *Post Express*, Sept. 4, 1911; McKelvey, *loc. cit.*, p. 189.
26. "James Breck Perkins" in *Dict. of Amer. Biog.*
27. "The Grandest Playground in the World," R. H. S., *Pub.* VII: 69-89.
28. *Men of Iron, the History of the New York Central* (New York, 1938).
29. These and later contributors can be found through the use of the *Consolidated Index* issued as R.H.S., *Pub.* XV.
30. *World War Service Record of Rochester and Monroe County* (Rochester, 1924, 1928, 1930) 3 vol.
31. For several articles on the Centennial, *see* R.H.S., *Pub.* XIII: 1-125.