

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## A Panoramic Review of Rochester's History

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There is much to be gained by occasionally stepping aside some distance from the work we are doing, or the life we are leading, to get a broad view of our whole situation, both in time and place. Such a panoramic review of the growth of Rochester should be of interest both to the student of its history and to the citizen caught in the entangling mesh of the community's affairs as of 1949. Whence have these activities and responsibilities come, where will they lead, and what do they signify, are questions we can never fully answer, though an effort to see them in perspective may improve our orientation. Perhaps a panoramic survey will likewise answer the oft-expressed desire of curious but busy citizens and interested but fleeting visitors for something to read on Rochester that is both comprehensive and brief.

### The Pioneer Boom Town

Let us therefore step back far enough from our subject, the City of Rochester, to get a view of the whole western New York area a century and a half ago. The lakes and the river valleys were then much the same as today, but the rolling hills and indeed most of the terrain was heavily blanketed by a virgin forest that effectively hid the few pioneer roads and trails. Extensive open stretches bordering the twisting rivers were covered with a rich growth of tall grass—a promise of abundant crops as soon as the flood hazard could be reck-

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oned with. An occasional open clearing framing a log cabin or crude shanty revealed that settlement had already commenced though it had made little progress before 1800.

The occupation of the Genesee Country proceeded rapidly during the next decade. The largest settlements by 1810 were those of the Yankee migrants from New England who had pushed up the Mohawk and opened a crude road westward across the state to Lake Erie. Geneva, Canandaigua, Batavia, and Buffalo were already thriving villages on that route, while Bath, Dansville, Ithaca and a few lesser hamlets marked the northern flank of another stream of settlers from Pennsylvania and the Southeast. The log cabins of the pioneers were already giving way to painted frame dwellings, several of classical design, while churches, schools, stores and taverns were making their appearance. An active trade had developed along the Mohawk and Susquehanna river routes, for the 70,000 settlers in Ontario, Genesee, Steuben and the four lesser counties (which then comprised the whole of western New York State) were eagerly shipping out forest products, grain and whiskey in payment for land titles and the first articles needed for the building of civilization on the frontier.

Although earlier efforts to exploit the trade facilities of the lower Genesee had languished, a new activity was evident in 1810. President Jefferson's Embargo and Non-Intercourse acts had glutted the eastern seaboard markets, forcing prices down below the cost of transporting the produce of the Genesee to market by ox cart and flat boat. Many frontiersmen whose land payments were due, led by venturesome merchants eager to satisfy the mounting demand for eastern goods, were turning hopefully to the Genesee and other streams flowing into Lake Ontario where trade with the Canadian ports was not too vigilantly supervised.

Brighter prospects for trade stimulated a number of enterprising ventures on the lower Genesee. Ebenezer Allan's pioneer mills, built at the upper falls in 1789, had failed for want of customers, and the ravages of Genesee fever had checked the King's Landing settlement located at the lower falls a few years later. Charlotte at the mouth of the river had emerged as the favored site by 1810 when the number of sailing craft on the lake already exceeded a score. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately for the future importance of Rochester—the abundant produce of the valley, which began at this time to flow down the Genesee on log rafts, was halted eight miles south of Char-

lotte by the rapids and upper falls. Some of it was quickly loaded on ox carts and hauled overland to Charlotte or to the more accessible Irondequoit landing known as Tryon Town. But the break in river traffic suggested the advantages of a mill town at the upper falls—a natural site for the conversion of logs into boards or staves or potash, of grain into flour or whiskey.

No one supposed that the milling village planted on Allan's old hundred-acre tract by Colonel Nathaniel Rochester in 1812 would quickly grow into a thriving city. Indeed the outbreak of war with England on the eve of the arrival that May of Hamlet Scramont, the first permanent settler, cast a shadow over the northern frontier. Settlers at Charlotte and other lake ports hastily pulled up stakes. But the retreat was by no means a rout, and a number of the refugees chose Colonel Rochester's mill site, six miles from the river's mouth, as a safe refuge from the British fleet. The settlement grew even during the war years and numbered 332 souls when news of peace arrived early in 1815. The prospect of renewed trade with Canada might revive Charlotte or prompt the development of a new port on the lower Genesee, but the fortunes of a milling town at the upper falls seemed assured. Several enterprising residents boldly launched a campaign to secure a separate county with Rochester as its county seat.

This first expression of the community's rising ambition brought indignant protests from its older neighbors. Canandaigua and Batavia, respective seats of the large Ontario and Genesee Counties, successfully delayed action for several years, while a galaxy of Canandaiguans endeavored to head off Rochester's lake trade by promoting a settlement on the east bank of the river just below the lower falls. That it was an ideal site in some respects was demonstrated in 1817 when the *Ontario*, the first steamboat on the Great Lakes, visited its dock. In a further effort to divert traffic from the Rochester bridge (completed in 1812) and thus assure full advantage to Carthage, as the new port was ambitiously named, a timber bridge—the longest single-arch bridge in the world—was constructed across the gorge in 1819. But when this astonishing structure collapsed fifteen months later, the high hopes of Carthage likewise tumbled.

Rochester's first turning point came in 1817 (the year of its incorporation as a village) when the route of the Erie Canal was finally determined. The survey called for a Genesee crossing to be located between the main falls and the small upper falls (since blasted away

and replaced by the Court Street dam); the canal was to cross on an aqueduct to be constructed a block south of the Rochester bridge. That location had been predetermined by the geologic contours of the area, but a heated debate ensued before the old state-road settlements, led by Canandaigua and Batavia, accepted the inevitable. As construction of the canal proceeded during the next half-dozen years, dispelling doubts of its completion, the promise that the Genesee mill town would likewise become an important commercial center radically shifted the focus of power in western New York.

Not only did Rochester win the organization of Monroe County in 1821, but other evidences of its growing importance likewise appeared prior to the opening of the canal. Indeed the strength of the Genesee settlement was quickly displayed by the dual or multiple character of many local developments. Rochester, which had attracted its earliest settlers from both New England and the South, was destined to enjoy an ever-increasing heterogeneity. Thus the first newspaper, the weekly *Gazette*, founded in 1816 as a Jeffersonian organ with Colonel Rochester's backing, was quickly matched by the *Telegraph*, a weekly supported by the neo-Federalists. The first Presbyterian Church, organized in 1815 by pious Yankees, had scarcely completed a makeshift frame meeting-house before Episcopal, Catholic, Quaker and other religious societies were ready to share its use. Both private and district schools had made their appearance in the settlement's second year, 1813, and their number exceeded a dozen by 1825 when the town boasted at least two circulating libraries, a young men's Forum, and a Female Charitable Society organized in 1822. Two imposing stone churches, four lesser chapels, three weekly papers, and the Bank of Rochester chartered in 1824, marked the town's rapid rise to leadership among Genesee Country settlements.

Of course the driving force propelling Rochester ahead was the tremendous economic impetus given by the canal as it tapped the earlier trade of the Genesee. Although the aqueduct was not opened for another year, boats began to operate east from Rochester in the fall of 1823, and with the canal's completion to Buffalo two years later a steadily mounting commerce developed at Rochester. Lumber and other forest products comprised the bulk of the trade at the start, but flour, manufactured in increasing quantities by the Rochester mills, supplied the largest cash value and quickly established Rochester's position as the leading producer of flour in the country. The boats, many of them built in local yards, soon returned loaded with

merchandise and new settlers, and Rochester's population increased nearly 600 per cent within a decade.

No established village had ever before mushroomed so rapidly, growing from 1502 to 9207 within a ten-year span, and Rochester won recognition as America's first boom town. Other settlements would later exceed and prolong this experience, but Rochester was setting a pattern which most of them would follow.

Optimism was the order of the day. Among other seemingly fantastic enterprises of 1826 was the *Advertiser*, the first permanent daily established in any inland town west of Albany. Predictions of its failure were forgotten a year later when the *Telegraph* launched a daily in addition to its weekly issue. Soon a third daily entered the field, the *Anti-Masonic Enquirer*, heralding the establishment of a new political party, while both the *Observer* and the *Craftsman*, religious and agnostic respectively, swelled the list to ten local papers. The clatter of presses was increased by the publication of a popular local almanac and a score of other imprints annually by 1827 when the first village *Directory* made its appearance.

The "Young Lion of the West," as the village was proudly described in the *Directory* (where 70 pages were devoted to its remarkable history and facilities), had become the center of boisterous activities. Travelers arriving on the five stage lines, the canal packets or lake boats, overflowed the taverns, often joining the boatmen and other reckless elements in nightly revels which taxed the patience of the village watch. Three volunteer fire companies, lustily dousing an occasional blaze with buckets of water and soon with sputtering hand pumps, contributed to the general excitement. Circuses and other traveling entertainers, taverns and grog shops, a museum of wax figures, and two theaters made their appearance; finally the celebrated jumper, Sam Patch, arrived to make his last and fatal leap over the main falls of the Genesee on Friday, November 13, 1829.

The last jump of Sam Patch, which gained a sure place for Rochester in American folklore and spread the mill town's fame throughout the land, had a very different significance locally where a great throng was silenced by the unexpected tragedy. Sam's fatal leap served as the final climax to a decade of riotous living. The early advantages of the canal had been over-exploited, resulting in a local recession in 1829, followed by a period of more conservative development. The slower economic tempo gave time and perhaps incentive for religious reflection. The great revival led by Charles G. Finney

did not commence for another ten months, but the work of such zealous deacons as Josiah Bissell, founder of the six-day stage line and six-day packet company, prepared the way. When, after six months of almost daily preaching, Finney left Rochester in the spring of 1831, it was a changed community, animated by a new spirit of self-conscious restraint. The days of the boom town were over.

### The Flour City: 1834-1854

It was a much sobered Rochester which secured its first city charter in 1834. The first mayor, Jonathan Child, son-in-law of Colonel Rochester (who had died in 1831), refused to sign licenses for liquor shops, and when pressure for a more lenient policy mounted in the Council, Mayor Child resigned. Total abstinence lost out, and Rochester was never able to satisfy the desires of its temperance advocates, yet their vigorous campaigns frequently won victories at the polls. Substantial brick and stone churches, topped by lofty spires, began to dominate the skyline, symbols of the transplanted heritage not only of New England and the South but now also of Irish and German Catholic parishes and other Old World communities. Equipped with a total of fifty churches by the mid-fifties, Rochester won the title of banner city in the New York State Sunday School movement. Bible, tract, and missionary societies established regional headquarters in Rochester, attracted thither by the generous support of Aristarchus Champion and lesser patrons. The Rochester Orphan Asylum was opened in 1837 to help care for the many waifs lost or deserted by the flood of migrants streaming westward through Rochester; the Female Charitable Society continued its work among indigent residents.

This zealous dedication to good works was matched by the staunch convictions animating several new causes born in the Rochester area. Neither the Mormons, who had their beginning near Palmyra in 1829, nor the Millerites, who deeply stirred the region in 1844, played as prominent a role locally as the Fox Sisters who held the world's first public seance at the newly completed Corinthian Hall in November, 1849. A less spectacular but more significant gathering had met in the Unitarian chapel fifteen months before—the adjourned session of the first Woman's Rights Convention which transferred from Seneca Falls to Rochester in August, 1848. None of these new causes attracted many local disciples, certainly not as many

as the temperance and Bible societies, or the anti-slavery movement, but their spokesmen were exceedingly vocal and helped to associate local developments with the larger American scene.

The Flour City escaped the early rigors of the depression of 1837, largely by virtue of its flour output; and when even that market slumped in 1839, Rochester was able to weather the storm by importing western grain to help maintain its leadership in the flour-milling industry. Its dependence on western wheatfields gave warning, however, of an early change.

The influence of the new railroads slowly became evident. The Tonawanda Railway was completed from Rochester to Batavia in 1837, and the Rochester & Auburn to that latter village four years later. Local capital bore a large share of the first construction cost, but, when the inadequacies of these pioneer roads and the demand for heavier freight loads required extensive repairs or total reconstruction, outside capital was called in. By 1853 a single management was able to link the several short roads stretching across New York State into the New York Central system. Rochester lost control over these vital trade arteries, but its timely enterprise had won a secure place on the major east-west traffic route. This position would become increasingly important as the railroads outgrew their early character as mechanized stage lines and began to invade the freight business. Meanwhile the state determined to enlarge the Erie Canal, build a new aqueduct at Rochester, and a new canal from Rochester to Olean. These expenditures relieved much distress during the first years of the depression and helped to lay the foundation for recovery in the mid-forties.

Neither the canals nor the early railroads could recompense Rochester for its poor river and lake connections. The rapidly expanding steamboat trade on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers favored such commercial centers as Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville and St. Louis; and, on the Great Lakes, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago. The Federal government, which helped to improve these ports, built a pier and lighthouse at Charlotte as well, but Rochester no longer had suitable cargoes for that trade, since the rapid depletion of the valley's forests and the spread of blight through its wheatfields had limited the flow of raw materials. Fortunately, as farmers turned to sheep and cattle and finally to fruit, Rochester developed important wool and leather industries and began to cultivate extensive nurseries. With its hotels crowded by travelers headed westward and merchants

returning east for supplies, Rochester began to specialize in consumer products: ready-made shoes and clothing, tools, furniture, beer, tobacco, perfume and many other articles for which the demand was brisk.

If the new railroad lines (which made possible a wider marketing of these products, as well as those of the millers and nurserymen) had fallen under the control of outside capital, Rochester did assert and achieve leadership in the development of one vital commercial artery—the telegraph. The pioneer work of Henry O'Reilly as a telegraph builder enlisted the support of his old friends in Rochester and by the mid-fifties local men, headed by Hiram Sibley, had organized Western Union and with it were proceeding to establish unified control over most of the nation's telegraph lines.

The city's three-fold growth, from 14,404 in 1835 to 43,877 twenty years later, compelled the municipal authorities to undertake several new functions. The streets had to be improved, at least in the central district; wells and drain sewers had to be dug; oil lamps, installed and supplied; a police force and several volunteer fire companies, organized and equipped. A new and larger cemetery was laid out on Mount Hope; a public market was built. Public health regulations were seldom considered except during the recurrent cholera and typhoid epidemics; emergency measures to ease the hardships of the depression were no more effective. Economic hardship or disaster, the death of a breadwinner or homemaker, were among the experiences that confronted most families at one time or another, prompting thousands to pull up stakes and leave in search of greener pastures. More thousands were, however, coming to Rochester on that same quest—some from rural settlements in the area, many more from across the Atlantic. The city's development was considerably strengthened by these newcomers from abroad who, with their children, comprised more than a third of the population by the mid-century.

The city's cultural opportunities, though greatly enriched, were never quite adequate during the pre-Civil War years. Free public schools provided a democratic educational base in 1842, yet, even with the aid of private and parochial school facilities, the city failed to satisfy the expanding demand. Private academies thrived and a public high school was established in 1856, but the numbers who enjoyed these advantages were limited. Still more restricted was the clientele of the new university and theological seminary, both opened



in 1850 by the Baptists with strong community support. Although the percentages enrolled in all of these institutions were low by modern standards, the youth of Rochester enjoyed better opportunities than those of most comparable cities of the day.

Adults were likewise acquiring new cultural facilities. The Athenaeum, organized in 1829, was combined successively with the Young Men's Association and the Mechanics Association, thus renewing its vigor and enabling it to present an annual lecture series, starting in 1840, and to maintain an increasingly useful library on the second floor of the Arcade. The visiting lecturers, ranging from Emerson to the "Learned Blacksmith," attracted good audiences but could not rival the visiting stars of the musical world, notably Jenny Lind who packed Corinthian Hall on two occasions in 1851, yet together they made up somewhat for the poor theatrical offerings which failed to find support in Rochester. The city had its quota of artists, mostly portrait painters whose livelihood became more precarious with the arrival of the Daguerrian photographic process in the early forties. Visiting circus clowns and other entertainers never failed to receive a boisterous if brief reception; but the first notice of public bathing at the lake in 1854 and the first appearance of organized sports (in the cricket games of 1847) heralded new trends.

The average citizen of the pre-Civil War period was a small merchant or an independent craftsman. He had a store or shop of his own or shared one with a partner, and perhaps employed a few apprentices or other helpers. He occupied a separate house where his wife spent most of her time cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing, canning and in other ways maintaining the household, which generally included one or more dependent relatives or boarders in addition to the members of the immediate family. The care of the young, the sick, and the aged was often shared by all, as were such chores as milking the family cow, carrying water from the nearest pump, chopping wood for the several chunk stoves and fire-places on which most households relied for heat. Even if the home was situated on the outskirts of the city, everybody walked to work, to school, to church and normally returned for dinner and supper. The family, whether native or foreign, Protestant or Catholic, was the fundamental mainstay of society.

## The Flower City: 1855-1890

The consolidation of the several up-state New York railroads into the New York Central in 1853 was but one of several factors operating to transform Rochester from the principal market town and cultural center of the Genesee Country into a lesser member of the growing family of interior commercial and industrial cities. Not that its old regional hegemony was lost, but local ties were becoming less important to Rochester than its contacts with other cities, with more distant cultures, with new ideas and techniques. The change in its title (from Flour—to Flower City) was symbolic of the shift of emphasis from the older rustic virtues of the Yankee period to the more exotic values of the cosmopolitan community which emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Hints of the impending transformation appeared in the late fifties. Although neither Rochester's commercial activity nor its flour output declined in volume, the city's relative position dropped rapidly as other cities surged ahead in these fields. Many years were to pass before Rochester regained its competitive vigor, but already new specialties and younger leaders were emerging in the nursery, shoe, and clothing industries. Much of the new blood came from distant lands, bringing new and strange cultural patterns to the Genesee. After a brief manifestation of nativistic reaction in the mid-fifties, when the so-called American party temporarily gained control of the city, Rochester gradually learned to appreciate the contributions of its new citizens and, by assimilating ideas as well as people, kept pace with the dominant trends in America.

The Civil War helped indirectly to speed these developments. Descendants of the old Yankees learned a new kinship with the sons of Ireland and Germany who fought by their side to preserve the Union at Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, and in the Wilderness. Army orders helped to stimulate the growth of local shoe, clothing, and machine-tool industries and speeded their adaptation to distant markets. Rising prices compelled the increased number of wage workers to make their *first faltering attempts at collective bargaining*. The lengthening casualty lists drove many home folk to seek release from worry or sorrow at the theater or at outdoor recreation centers on the lake or the bay. So many families were reduced to poverty by the loss of their breadwinners that the community had to expand its

relief measures. New institutions were provided, not only for orphans, but for destitute widows and the aged as well; the first two hospitals were completed and equipped.

When finally the terrible carnage was ended, the Flower City, with the rest of America, faced a period of psychological convalescence. Local party rivalries had been embittered by intemperate charges of "copperhead" and "nigger-lover," and a spiteful factionalism continued to obstruct action on important civic issues. The glitter of sudden wealth encouraged speculation and distracted attention from sober industry, with the result that many, even among the frugal, were pulled down into the deep valley of bankruptcy and unemployment during the mid-seventies. To the broken families left by the war were now added victims of the depression, creating a seemingly permanent army of dependent persons.

Fortunately the picture was not totally dark. Indeed the quarter-century following the Civil War witnessed a sufficient number of constructive achievements to justify the new burst of optimism which enlivened the Flower City of the eighties.

That creative energies were at work, building a sound basis for the community's development, became evident as enterprise, both individual and collective, took precedence over speculative ventures in the late seventies. The millers, unable to regain national or local prominence, at least remodelled their establishments, introducing turbines, metal grinding disks, and other improvements. The nursery and seed men, by steadily perfecting their products and their methods of distribution, maintained leadership in the horticultural field, spreading the Flower City's fame far beyond the nation's borders. The shoe manufacturers made the most rapid shift to factory production, introducing the newest machinery and precipitating the most critical labor-management conflicts. Only the clothing merchant-manufacturers rivaled the shoe men in the numbers employed; indeed the steady influx of skilled needle workers from abroad and the enterprise shown in the development of both marketing techniques and standardized products, enabled the clothing industry to take a sure lead locally by 1890 and to establish Rochester as one of America's five principal centers of men's clothing production.

A few charlatans made their appearance, but Rochester's contributions to technological advance were striking and enduring. Ingenious inventions made the Kimball tobacco factory the first large producer of cigarettes in America, and enabled George B. Selden to

design and patent this country's first automobile. Skilled craftsmanship won national leadership for the thermometers of the Taylor Brothers, the lenses and microscopes of Bausch & Lomb, the Cunningham carriages, the Sargent locks—to mention only a few—foreshadowing Rochester's emphasis on quality products. H. H. Warner's Safe Liver Cure pills were more widely advertised; moreover, his skill as an organizer found expression in the establishment of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce in 1888, but his ascendancy was to be short-lived. In fact, it was the shy and reserved George Eastman whose experiments with photographic dry plates, whose success in perfecting the camera and a flexible film, coupled with a genius for organization, performed the major industrial miracles of this period in Rochester and assured the city a prosperous future.

These and other constructive ventures would have been seriously checked, perhaps frustrated, had not the community developed sufficient enterprise to tackle some of the unsolved problems of its pre-Civil War period. The city needed water, coal, external and internal transport improvements, and other public or quasi-public facilities. The first chartered public utility, the Rochester Gas Company, had arrived in 1848, and the first horsecar company had commenced operation during the Civil War, but both required frequent rejuvenation during these years. The city itself, after long hesitation, had to take over the task of building a water system in the seventies after two unsuccessful water companies had left the community dependent upon unsanitary wells and defenseless against ravaging fires. The Holly and Hemlock systems, opened in 1874 and 1876 respectively, proved of incalculable benefit, but likewise compelled the city to dig its first sanitary sewer system. Rochester's efforts to improve its coal supplies prompted an extensive use of municipal credit in order to encourage the construction of new coal roads, and while the city was forced during the depression to sacrifice many of these investments, the community as a whole benefited enormously from the abundant supply of fuel thus assured.

Improvements in other civic fields included a half-dozen new bridges; the surfacing of approximately a fourth of the total street mileage (275), including 17 miles of Medina stone pavement in the central district; the installation of over 2000 gas and electric street lamps; the development of street maintenance work, including a sprinkling program for the summer months; the organization of a paid police force and a fire department equipped with horse-drawn

steamers and a telegraphic alarm system; the institution of a system of garbage collection, inefficient but none the less useful; and, finally, a park system, tardily created in 1888 but destined to win additional laurels for the Flower City. New public utilities made their appearance during the eighties—the telephone, the electric light, and one of the world's pioneer commercial steam plants—while the old traction company was reorganized and electrified by 1890. Perhaps the most important improvement in this field was the removal of the grade crossings over the New York Central, accomplished in 1881 when the company, responding to the city's demand, elevated its tracks.

These extensive economic developments brought many changes in the appearance and life patterns of the city. The population had trebled since 1855, reaching 133,896 by 1890, but the city escaped congestion by more than doubling its area. The majority no doubt still walked to work, locating their homes and their jobs in the same section of the city; many others now used the street cars, which enabled them to build cottages or villas on the outskirts. The old preference for free-standing houses was maintained, and with the development of co-operative home-mortgaging programs, Rochester took the lead among American cities in the percentage of owner occupancy. The rapid shift to factory production increased the proportion of wage earners and spurred a new drive for unionization; strikes and lockouts occurred, but Rochester escaped the more violent aspects of the industrial unrest which swept over America without conclusive result in these years.

The city's expansion gave a strong impetus to other local trends. The business district was greatly enlarged and pulled eastward by the construction of the east-side New York Central station in 1883. The local industrial emphasis on consumer products destined for wide markets was but one part of a nation-wide trend away from local self-sufficiency to a far-flung economy. Consumers in Rochester also began to select their purchases from equally wide origins. One of the most important agencies for this exchange was the department store, and the Sibley, Lindsay & Curr store set the pace in Rochester during these years, emerging as the focal center of a new east-side shopping district. Amidst the extensive alterations in the downtown area, aesthetic considerations were frequently neglected, but the strong influence of local nurserymen helped to line the residential streets with trees, prompted householders to develop flower as well as vegetable

gardens, and spurred creation of the park system which promised to enhance the Flower City's reputation as a beautiful community.

Great changes were likewise occurring in the social and cultural fields. Although the city was still unable to provide educational facilities to meet the rapidly increasing demand, some advances were made, including the building of a new Free Academy. Only the activity of several private schools and the creation of a parochial school system by the Catholics mitigated the community's shortcomings in this field. Similarly, in the field of public welfare, the huge relief tasks imposed by the Civil War and the depression called for the combined efforts of public and private charities. By 1890 the city boasted four hospitals, three free dispensaries, three orphan asylums, three industrial schools for the care and training of homeless older children, and a half-dozen other charitable institutions designed to relieve the plight of unfortunate citizens. Judged by contemporary standards, Rochester was well equipped in both the educational and welfare fields by 1890, but the new urban society which was spreading over America was nowhere more than vaguely aware of the tremendous sociological responsibilities devolving on the city.

Perhaps the most striking innovation in Rochester's life was the rapid development of organized sports and other recreational opportunities. Baseball and boating had made a faltering start in 1858, and both quickly revived after the war. Unfortunately the zest for victory brought early discouragement as larger cities engaged professional players. Rochester finally enlisted the support necessary to maintain a professional team and accepted its place in the new International League in the late eighties. The disappointments which surrounded the city's major team throughout most of this period could not dampen the ardor of young men and boys for sport generally. Scores of neighborhood teams competed for the use of empty lots. Cricket failed to win the enthusiasm accorded to croquet, the bicycle after its introduction in 1880, the roller skate which arrived four years later, and horse racing which enjoyed a national triumph when Maude S shattered all records by trotting a mile in 2:11 1/4 time before a crowd of 20,000 at the Rochester Driving Park in 1881. Boating on the river and sailing on the lake or bay were popular throughout this period, while camping and bathing at these and other local watering places was becoming a standard feature of the summer program of many citizens. Indeed the creation of the park system recognized the importance of outdoor recreational facilities.

A spirit of gayety and excitement animated the community. New-comers from abroad, whatever their hardships, rejoiced over the many real advantages they enjoyed. Their cultural and benefit societies sponsored innumerable picnics in summertime and, in colder months, musicals, dances, and dramatic entertainments, many based on old-country traditions which were still fondly cherished. Clubs and societies multiplied, even among residents of native antecedents, for the older neighborhood and family associations were proving incapable of fulfilling the manifold social needs of the expanding city.

The quickening influence of cosmopolitan contributions was widely apparent in the arts. Thus a good share of the musical and dramatic talent and much of their popular support came from humble immigrant families. Foreign influences were likewise strong in the graphic arts, but in this case they came through the study abroad of favored local artists and through the treasures brought back from Europe by art patrons. Several hundred originals and copies of famous masters were on display in the sumptuous gallery maintained by Daniel W. Powers on the fifth floor of his massive commercial block at the principal Four Corners. That art had an important social function was apparent as this gallery, opened in 1875, became the center of fashionable balls, receptions, and suppers in Rochester, unrivaled until the erection in 1888 of the Lyceum Theater supplied a new and elegant center for still other kinds of entertainment.

There was as little encouragement for those seeking to establish critical standards in the arts as for those who ventured off the beaten track in theology or the other fields of learning. Yet the multiplicity of tastes and viewpoints was already prompting an objective search for truth—requiring at least a choice among alternate values. Indeed, while the university and most of the churches continued to emphasize traditional beliefs, a new interest in scientific inquiry was evident in Rochester. The old Athenaeum and Mechanics Association made the mistake of discontinuing its annual science lectures and soon closed its library and disbanded, giving place to the Academy of Science which provided scope for amateur experimenters and professional students alike. A few doctors, lawyers, and ministers began to ponder the implications of the new evolutionary theories, thus keeping abreast with the foremost intellects of the contemporary world. At least one Rochesterian, Lewis H. Morgan, was making an original contribution of the first order in his books on social anthropology. Almost equally significant locally was the inspiration to scientific

study given by the recreated forms of Ward's Natural Science Establishment and the astronomical observations of Lewis Swift. In the broader field of human relations Rochester had Susan B. Anthony whose unflagging zeal in the battle for woman's rights won both national fame and local respect before the close of this period.

## A Period of High Aspirations: 1890-1930

The widely publicized phrase, "Rochester-made means quality," was more than an advertiser's slogan in the Rochester of the next four decades, for it aptly expressed the spirit of high ambition which enlivened almost every aspect of the city's life. Many Rochesterians became firmly convinced during these years that a conscientious use of latent talents would produce a superior community on the banks of the Genesee. Not only did Rochester specialize in quality products in order to win a rich market, but it strove for the best schools, the best parks, the best water system, the best medical care, the best welfare institutions, the best city plans, the best government, the best athletic teams, the best musical facilities, the best in every field where that goal could possibly be achieved. Amidst the super-optimism of an expansive period, these aspirations did not seem unreasonable, and, although they were not all to be attained, the community fully enjoyed an ebullient *esprit de corps*.

The emphasis on quality products was already apparent before 1890. The lack of heavy industry and the absence of convenient local supplies of raw material had favored the development of highly technical industries based on patents and skills. The search for national markets was encouraged by the example of the nursery and seed men, and widely traveling sales agents soon confirmed the advantages to be won by quality products. The men's clothing and ladies' shoe firms quickly developed quality brands, but while the former industry ultimately reached a happy solution of its labor-management problems, the latter was so weakened by fratricidal struggles that most of the companies eventually failed or left town. The local tobacco industry was absorbed and withdrawn by the national tobacco trust; the brewery firms, on the other hand, proved hardy enough to survive even the blight of the prohibition era. The old Cunningham carriage factory turned to the manufacture of custom-built automobile chassis and other articles designed for the luxury market.



A number of new and highly technical products rivaled the quality standards of earlier producers in this field. The Ritter Dental Co.'s chairs and equipment, the Todd Co.'s check protectographs, Yawman & Erbe's office furniture, the Pfaudler Co.'s glass-lined tanks, the electrical appliances of several strong competing firms were representative of a host of new and ingenious articles produced in Rochester. Among the older firms, several increased their assortment and output of excellent products: the Taylor instruments, the Gleason gears, the optical products of Bausch & Lomb, and of course the cameras and film of the Eastman Kodak Co. Despite the incentive to monopoly control, each of Rochester's successful specialties inspired the organization of local competitors headed by ingenious men who dared to pit their skill or inventions against the towering strength of older firms. Quality was the touchstone: much could be and was gained with it.

Indeed the profits were often considerable, and Rochester gradually achieved a high place among the wealthier cities of America. Many of its industries required workmen with technical skills not covered by the old established unions. Several firms followed George Eastman's policy of paying good wages in order to forestall unionization, and the Kodak company went a step further in 1912 when it installed one of the first employee-dividend programs in the country. Trade unionism remained entrenched in the building trades, in printing and a few other fields. The declining influence of the shoe workers' union was offset by the growth of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers after the arbitration agreement of 1918 provided a sound basis for peaceful negotiations. The agreement gained favor by accepting the principle of the open shop, popular in Rochester where many skilled but unorganized workers were still able to enjoy better wages than the craft unions could secure. Several of the unions as well as the firms developed welfare programs and some even assisted members or employees respectively to buy their homes. Indeed most Rochesterians still aspired to own their own homes, and although the percentage of owner-occupancy was falling, as in all parts of the country, Rochester still ranked among the top two or three large cities in this respect. The ratios of telephones and bathtubs per family were improving; automobile club membership grew until it rivaled that of much larger cities.

Translation of the optimistic zeal for high standards from the economic to the civic and cultural fields was a difficult task. Indi-

vidual leaders were required for each extension of the ideal, and only the persistent triumphed, for change and reform, whether political or social, are slow processes in a democracy where the will of the majority must be spurred to overcome its own inertia and the opposition of entrenched interests. Nevertheless, Rochester's expansive mood in the rosy dawn of the twentieth century made it responsive to numerous campaigns for higher community standards.

In order to maintain the excellence of its products, Rochester required educational facilities of a superior quality. The industrialists, led by Dr. Edward Bausch, had established *Mechanics Institute* in 1885 for this very purpose, and the Institute pioneered in the development of technical training during the nineties. Many citizens recognized, however, that shop training would not suffice, and when the political authorities misused their control over the public schools, a group of reformers, headed by Joseph T. Alling, bolted the Republican party and waged a successful battle for an independent school board. George Aldridge, the astute Republican boss, quickly learned his lesson; not only was a small, non-political school board set up in 1900, but generous support was likewise given it in successive years, enabling Professor George M. Forbes and his associates to press forward with the development of one of the most adequate and progressive school systems in the country.

Aldridge applied part of his lesson to other civic fields, maintaining superior fire and police departments, extending the excellent water system to meet the city's expanding needs, developing the street and sewer systems as occasion arose, and thus strengthening his political control. The most noteworthy civic accomplishments, outside the public schools, occurred in the park system which grew in size, beauty and usefulness until it rivalled the best in the country. While the beautiful displays at Highland Park, notably the lilac collection, attracted widest praise, the recreational features at the other major parks and at the several playgrounds opened in the years before and immediately after the First World War proved extremely popular. The only other public service worthy of comparison with the schools and the parks was the public health program perfected under the leadership of Dr. George W. Goler. Its rapid expansion after 1900 was marked by the application of scientific methods to the battle against contagion, contaminated milk and other foods, and unsanitary conditions of all sorts. The rapid expansion of the city's

hospital facilities and private medical services helped to give Rochester one of the lowest infant mortality rates in America.

High standards had been won only by forthright effort, and it soon became apparent that they could be maintained only by continued vigilance. In some fields Rochester never got much beyond its initial victories. Thus the city bestirred itself on two occasions to gratify an aspiration for model city plans, only to sit back and permit the beautifully drawn charts to be pigeonholed. As it happened, neither the Brunner plan of 1911 nor the Bartholomew plan of 1930 was indigenous or very aptly related to the local problem, and the cost of carrying either into effect in its entirety would have been wasteful. However, failure to plan the city's current improvements likewise proved wasteful—a waste for which the citizens in this case had to pay. This fact, together with the distrust aroused by the back-stage decisions even of a benevolent boss, produced the vigorous campaign of the mid-twenties for a city manager charter.

A major factor in the adoption of this reform was the support of George Eastman. The death of George Aldridge, shortly before the decision was made, may likewise have had its effect, for Rochester was not certain of his successor. While the Aldridge lieutenants were battling for control of the party, Stephen B. Story became the first City Manager. He had come to Rochester as director of the Bureau of Municipal Research a decade before and had already won recognition as a champion not only of good government but also of a better Rochester. Active in, or respected by, all the vigorous reform groups of the twenties—the City Manager League, the Men's and the Women's City Clubs, the Chamber of Commerce and the Central Trades Council—Story became the symbol of Rochester's aspirations to the title of best-governed city.

"Do it for Rochester," a slogan introduced by the Chamber of Commerce in 1905, proved especially useful in the field of charity, long a favorite local concern. Few other cities were so elaborately equipped with institutions as Rochester by 1910 when the plea came to suppress vested jealousies in the interests of efficiency and to set up a United Charities Association. Again the first victory was not enough, and a new effort was required in 1918 to found the Community Chest—a central fund-raising agency which grew out of the notably successful War Chest. The large annual contributions of George Eastman helped to develop a tradition of wide and generous giving, and many volunteers enlisted for the canvass each year. The

establishment of a Council of Social Agencies in 1924 provided joint citizen and professional leadership which has since placed Rochester in the forefront of the world's most charity-minded cities.

Unfortunately, as the twenties advanced, many Rochesterians interpreted the Chamber's slogan as directed primarily to George Eastman. They applauded vigorously as the Kodak magnate's munificent gifts were announced: a first-class music school, with America's third largest theater as an adjunct to its activity; funds to erect and maintain a dental dispensary; still bigger donations to help secure Rockefeller grants for a great new medical school and hospital; many millions more to develop and endow a new men's campus for the University of Rochester. The university's bold bid for recognition as one of the outstanding centers of scientific study in America was quite in harmony with the community's faith in quality, yet it would have been impossible, or at least much less spectacular, without the aid of George Eastman.

Eastman's largess distorted somewhat the natural development of Rochester's social and cultural facilities, but each of his great endowments was built on earlier foundations: the musical traditions nurtured especially by the Germans; the scientific interests cultivated over a long period by enquiring and practical minds, among them Dr. Edward Mott Moore whose devotion to the parks likewise enlisted Eastman gifts; a university long free from sectarian bias and ready to undertake objective research in several fields.

Some equally worthy community traditions did not require endowments or received them from other sources. The churches enjoyed wide support and several opened useful community institutes or parish homes; the theological seminary was richly endowed by Rockefeller. Interest in baseball sustained a number of pennant winning teams; both public and private facilities accommodated newly-popular games, such as golf, tennis, basketball, soccer and football. Clubs and societies of all kinds multiplied, affording a virtually unlimited choice of associations, many of them so open to all interested citizens that the old ethnic alignments tended to disappear, except those maintained by choice or, unfortunately, by the color line; but even these exceptions, lamented by many citizens, were less evident in Rochester than in almost any other American city. The social-center movement, developed under the leadership of Edward J. Ward in 1907, utilized several of the school buildings for neighborhood functions rich in genuine democratic values, attracting nation-wide

interest in the program, which was unfortunately curtailed despite loud protests a few years later. Rochester's absorption of cosmopolitan influences and people, commenced in the second half of the nineteenth century, was thus carried forward in the early twentieth, and with happy result as far as it went.

Yet the promise of earlier traditions was not fulfilled in every case. The city's reluctance to grant tax exemption to Daniel Powers for the support of his art gallery prompted its sale after his death in 1897, and Rochester did not acquire a new gallery until the Memorial Art Gallery was opened in 1913. A considerable portion of the earlier support for painting was being deflected, as it was from the legitimate theater, by marvelous photographic innovations, nurtured in part in Rochester; moreover, local society had shifted its functions to the sumptuous town and country clubs and to the Eastman Theater's splendid musical programs. Friends of the new gallery, including members of the Rochester Art Club, active since 1877, and local devotees of drama who organized in 1923 one of the first successful community-player groups in the country, had almost to begin again with educational efforts to develop sensitivity and encourage participation in these fields. The disappointments they experienced were shared by their fellow artists in most comparable American cities, but book-lovers in Rochester suffered special handicaps. The Reynolds Library, heir to the books of the old Athenaeum, was denied tax support and performed little more than a reference function throughout this period; although a public library system began to serve the community in 1912, it was another twenty-four years before the opening of the Rundel Memorial Building provided Rochester with a really adequate and beautiful central library. Similarly, the Municipal Museum of Arts and Sciences labored under difficulties for nearly three decades before the erection of Bausch Hall in 1940 provided scope for its development as one of the model museums of the country.

Of course this hasty sketch of the city's skyline of aspirations between the years 1890 and 1930 fails to show the extent of the depths and the many arid stretches which preceded and often followed the peaks of effort and attainment. A just appraisal of Rochester's accomplishments during the period so greatly influenced by George Eastman and George Aldridge must await fuller study, but some conclusions are apparent.

The community's aspirations for high standards were somewhat more sentimental than intellectual in spirit. Honest critics were never very welcome, as was discovered by Mrs. Caroline B. Crane, brought to Rochester to survey the civic and welfare scene in 1911, and by Charles B. Raitt who appraised local recreational features in 1928. Even strongly entrenched local reformers, such as the Reverend Algernon Crapsey, the Reverend Paul M. Strayer, Professor Walter Rauschenbusch, Professor George M. Forbes, Mrs. Helen Barrett Montgomery and their many colleagues, had to rally supporters into zealous organizations in order to achieve the measures in which the city ultimately took pride. Opportunities for the advancement of new ideas or tastes were curtailed somewhat toward the close of the period when the five daily papers of the nineties were finally consolidated into two under one management. Many sensitive spirits, baffled by these and other circumstances, gave up the struggle for expression, convinced that Rochester's proud claims to quality were complacent delusions.

### The Uncertain Present

Of course the charge of complacency scarcely fitted a community which had so hopefully aspired for many years to high quality standards, but these old aspirations now faced a serious challenge with the onset of the great depression. Rochester industries weathered the storm by curtailing employment, like manufacturers elsewhere, but the community boldly faced the challenge and organized a local work relief program prior to the adoption of Federal measures in this field. Local banks proved sound, but a wave of foreclosures swept many slack enterprises over the falls. Hundreds of householders, unable to meet the high mortgage charges assumed in a period of inflation, lost their homes. The construction industry slowed to a stand-still, neglecting even the repair of old buildings, with the result that Rochester saw the development of a new situation—overcrowding and progressive deterioration in the older sections and vacant houses on the outskirts. The rising curve of population growth leveled off, thus throwing many realty, commercial, and civic calculations out of focus. An economy drive swept City Manager Story from office and shattered prospects for municipal improvement.

Rochester's self-confidence was shaken, and it did not help matters, psychologically, to have state and national agencies proffer assistance.

The city, believing that it was sufficiently strong and humane to meet its local relief burdens, resented the implication that Federal assistance was required; on the other hand, Rochesterians, who were by no means provincial in their sympathies, generally voted at least by small majorities for the national New Deal measures. Furthermore, the community's breadth of view, a result in part of its cosmopolitan antecedents and of its dependence on national and world markets, became evident during the war in the generous response given to drives for foreign relief, and since the war in the ready support enlisted by the local United Nations Associations. Perhaps some of the earlier ardor for civic improvement has been transferred to world causes, where the need surely is great, but with the return of self-confidence a new concern for the elevation of local standards is appearing.

The fact that quality standards were maintained in local industry, even during the depth of the depression, enabled Rochester manufacturers to render great service in the war and to win new markets in the post-war economy. Organized labor, protected in many ways by the Wagner Act, achieved some gains in membership during the depression, and in wage standards towards its close, but local advances in this field have not compared with those in most other industrial cities. Earlier standards have been maintained in all the fields endowed by George Eastman and in the welfare fields supported by the Community Chest; new accomplishments have appeared in other cultural areas, such as the library, the museum, and the new Nazareth College, and great new advances are impending in the hospital field. Indeed, wherever voluntary subscriptions are involved, Rochester generally goes over the top.

Although a need for economy checked the development of civic services during the depression, the city proved reluctant to relinquish any of its hard-won distinctions. Thus a recommendation that certain school features be trimmed, since they exceeded the average urban provision, has not been carried into effect, for Rochester still considers its children entitled to superior services. Blocked by this unwillingness to cut the program, economy experts have devised a schedule for debt reduction designed to eliminate interest payments from future tax burdens. The program, popularized under the slogan, "Hold the line until '49", has postponed several much-desired projects, but it has also speeded the debt's retirement and focused attention on improvements in the years ahead.

Some of the uncertainties of the past two decades are beginning to disappear, now that the prospects of a stable rather than an expanding population have been accepted and the necessary adjustments made. Although physical improvement has inevitably become more difficult as stability has increased, Rochester cannot forget that its ideal has for many decades been a better city, not a bigger one. That high civic standards are to be insisted upon—whether the improvements are local, state, or national—has recently been demonstrated in the negotiations between city and state officials over the thruway plans. A similar care for high standards influenced the community's response to its post-war housing shortage, with the result that Fernwood, Ramona Park and Norton Village, three moderate-income apartment projects for veterans, have attracted praise throughout the country. While no attack has yet been made on the more difficult problem of the slums, the city's staunch traditions in the welfare field seem to suggest that this task will likewise be undertaken in time and handled in the best interests of the community and its families.

If Rochester's old quest for quality is now to be resumed, we may reasonably expect that it will be taken up in a mid-twentieth century spirit. The long emphasis on science, both in the public schools, in advanced study, and at the work bench has made us more realistic, perhaps more objective in our judgments, than the romantic if not sentimental Rochesterians of a half-century ago. But shall we now be able to assume in larger numbers the more imaginative functions of expressing, enjoying, and integrating our culture in art, literature, music, and other forms of intellectual fellowship? In short, will the earnest effort to build a civilized community on the banks of the Genesee, creative as it has been in many practical ways, finally achieve cultural creativity and comprehension? We have most of the essential institutions and facilities, as well as the productive capacity to support them and to afford us the necessary leisure. Still we seem to lack some of the sensitivity, reverence for the human spirit, spontaneity, and zest for exploration requisite to these higher accomplishments. Perhaps there is hope in the fact that in our present objective mood we feel a desire to keep our deficiencies, in these and other respects, before us and before the youth of Rochester in whose potentialities we still have faith.