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## THE PORT OF ROCHESTER A History of Its Lake Trade

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The decision to build the St. Lawrence Seaway has stirred so much discussion of the prospects ahead for the Port of Rochester that a review of its history seems appropriate. Of course, the past cannot supply answers for our dilemmas, or foretell their outcome, but an attentive study of the complexities of the port's history may shed some light on the variety of factors to be considered as we plan future developments.

Thus, as we shall see, the fluctuating fortunes of the Rochester port did not depend exclusively on the breeching of a sandbar and the dredging of a harbor, although these have been continuing problems for a century and a half. The Federal Government, on which Rochester has relied for such improvements, exerted additional influences through its tariff policies and its negotiation of trade agreements with Britain and Canada. The fluctuating enterprise of shipbuilders and steamship lines, of blast furnaces and other industrial users of lake-born freight, of railroads as feeders or as competitors—all these and many other factors have had their effect on the development of the Rochester port.

For long decades the activities at the port were a conscious and a vital part of the city's life, adding drama and excitement as well as economic benefit to Rochester's growth. For other long decades the port was practically forgotten or treated idly as a minor part of a lakeside amusement center. Its future will depend on our reaction to these old and several new potentialities, but let us dip back for the next twenty pages into its past.

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## The Early Lake Trade

A thorough study of the port's history would begin with the glaciers. Their movements and deposits not only blocked the path of the gently flowing Genesee of 500,000 years ago, diverting it to the west of its natural course through the Irondequoit Bay, but also filled in the northern portion of the new Genesee gorge, which at one time extended several miles further into the broad valley now covered by Lake Ontario. As a result, Rochester has two potential ports, both clogged by silt and requiring constant dredging but free from rock formations and extending several miles south of the present shore line.<sup>1</sup>

The broad expanse of Irondequoit Bay presented an ideal harbor, during Indian and colonial times. Canoes and bateaux had no difficulty in crossing the sandbar at the mouth of the bay and could move freely over its shallow waters. Apparently La Salle hesitated to bring his 20-ton brigantine, the second to sail on the lake, into the bay on his visit to this region in December 1678; and Denonville likewise stood off shore with his three brigs and his fleet of canoes and bateaux in July 1687, pitching his base camp on a sandspit at the mouth of the bay; but more peaceful visitors generally paddled in to the Indian Landing at the head of the bay—a site long since silted over and occupied today by Ellison Park<sup>2</sup>

More than a dozen small sailing vessels appeared on Lake Ontario during the next century. Their use was chiefly military and their occasional visits to the Rochester area were less important to its trade than the constant movement of canoes and bateaux. Rival French and British trading posts stood near Indian Landing for a few years around 1720, but the furs of the Genesee Valley had already been depleted, and it was not until white men began to arrive as permanent settlers seventy years later that any genuine commercial activity developed.<sup>3</sup>

Again the major freight burden was carried by bateaux and crudely constructed rafts paddled or pushed westward along the shore from Oswego or the Black River. Many turned into Irondequoit Bay for refuge from a storm or to trade at Tryon Town located in 1797 near the old Indian Landing site. Salt from Salina by way of the Oswego outlet, merchandise from the east or from the St. Lawrence, household goods brought in by the settlers themselves comprised the imports, while potash and other forest products supplied a growing volume of exports. Unfortunately for Tryon Town and the merchants on the bay, the sandbar

at its mouth presented so great a hazard to the small sailing craft which had begun to appear by 1790 that they turned instead to the near-by Genesee.<sup>4</sup>

The natural flow of the river maintained a fair channel at its mouth, and while a sandbar presented hazards a half mile off shore, the early sailors learned to follow a devious course into its safe harbor. Shortly after Jay's treaty clarified American rights to Lake Ontario's southern shore, merchants from New England began to seek out its advantageous town sites; among others, the Kings and the Grangers arrived from Connecticut to found a trading settlement on the west bank below the lower falls. Eli Granger built the "Jemima" there in 1797, the first American built schooner, a 30-ton ship which he sold to Augustus Porter of Lewiston the next July.<sup>5</sup> The ravages of "Genesee Fever" defeated the promoters of King's Landing, but Charlotte, a rival settlement at the mouth of the river, prospered moderately. Soon the merchants of Tryon Town were content to ferry their produce out through the bay and into the river for transshipment on the schooners that put into the Genesee port. A customs agent was appointed in 1805, and a dozen crude shacks and log cabins made Charlotte the principal settlement on the lake between Oswego and Lewiston by 1810.<sup>6</sup>

Much more substantial settlements had already developed to the south and east, at Canandaigua, Geneva, Bath and a dozen other points, but the site of Rochester was still unoccupied, and it was not until the adoption of the Embargo and Non-Intercourse acts discouraged trade over the inland routes and turned it down the Genesee towards Canada that the prospects for a northern port brightened and the development of a city at the falls commenced. Shipments from the Genesee, valued at \$30,000 in 1806, jumped in two years to \$100,000 in wheat, pork, whiskey and potash. Fifteen schooners and open boats, capable of carrying from 25 to 75 tons each, tacked back and forth between the lake ports in 1808.<sup>7</sup> Two small vessels were built on Irondequoit Bay, one of which capsized at its landing, but again the hazards of shallow water turned builders to the lower Genesee where at least two additional schooners were constructed in these years.<sup>8</sup>

Trade with Canada mounted so rapidly that DeWitt Clinton used it as an argument for the building of the Erie Canal. Wheat, selling at 12.5 cents a bushel in Geneva, commanded 31 cents at Charlotte, and it seemed to Clinton unwise to permit Canadian merchants to reap the benefits New York and Albany might have.<sup>9</sup> Of course the Genesee

trade was advantageous to both sides, as the hardships suffered by its interruption during the War of 1812 demonstrated. Yet the exposed position of Charlotte during that struggle discouraged its merchants and prompted the establishment of a new trading port named Carthage and located three miles up river on the east bank. A dock was built at the river's edge in 1817 and a wooden arch bridge—the longest in the world in its day—was constructed across the gorge in an effort to head off the trade going to the west-side landing, revived as Hanford's Landing. The collapse of the bridge in 1820 shattered its promoters' dreams of making Carthage the principal settlement of the area<sup>10</sup> and centered their attention on the needs of a port. A lift to carry produce and passengers up and down the 200-foot cliff greatly facilitated the approach to the dock, while an old Indian trail along the east side of the river was converted into a tow path to enable sailors to pull their boats up or down the deep gorge.<sup>11</sup>

Lake Ontario's trade increased rapidly after the return of peace. The price of wheat soared to \$2.50 a bushel and flour sold at \$15 a barrel for a short time in 1815. Log rafts and partially enclosed scows brought the produce of the valley down the Genesee to the upper falls where the mill town of Rochester had been founded in 1812. There the grain was ground into flour, the logs converted into boards or staves or other lumber products for easier shipment to Canada. A fleet of approximately 60 sailing vessels was engaged in the commerce of Lake Ontario, and an average of 15 boats a day passed down the St. Lawrence during a six weeks period in 1818. Several short canals had been constructed around the worst of that river's numerous rapids, permitting sailors to draw their boats up river loaded with merchandise, but many descended never to return, for among the lake's exports were numerous schooners, some of them built on the lower Genesee.<sup>12</sup>

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A new era opened with the arrival of the first steamboat at Carthage landing in 1817. Built at Sackets Harbor during the previous winter, the "Ontario" (the third of at least seven ships to bear that name) was 110 feet long by 24 foot beam and weighed 240 tons. Like most steamboats of the day, it had two masts for sails and was equipped with a side-wheel and low-power engine and boasted several cabins on the deck which covered its 8.5-foot hold. The Canadians likewise built a steamboat that year, and two sloops were soon fitted out with engines, yet the volume of tonnage they carried was modest compared with that

hailed by schooner. The significant innovation was the regularity of the service now available to shippers as well as passengers. A schedule of visits east and west between Ogdensburg and Lewiston once a week was announced for the "Ontario" in 1818. Soon the number who traveled for pleasure increased, and Rochester began to attract the side glances of the mounting stream of visitors to Niagara Falls, as many travel journals of the day reveal.<sup>13</sup>

The volume of Genesee shipments mounted steadily in these years. The 5,000 bushels of flour shipped to Montreal in the last three months of 1817 increased to 21,567 during the four months following the port's opening the next April, when 1158 bushel of pearl ash and 120,000 double butt staves were also loaded for export.<sup>14</sup> The total value of the shipments that year was given as \$300,000, increasing to \$500,000 and \$807,000 four and five years later. The collector reported the export of 67,468 bushels of flour, 5,310 of pot and pearl ash, 2,643 of beef and pork and 709 of whiskey in 1820, besides considerable quantities of corn, oil, cheese, butter, lard, cider, fruit and many lumber products loaded on a total of 316 vessels.<sup>15</sup> The marine lists printed in the Rochester weeklies that summer told of the arrival of several schooners every day, sometimes as many as eight, while the "Ontario" docked at Carthage twice a week on its trips east and west and regularly met a packet sloop operated by its owners as a pick-up boat which stopped at smaller ports, such as Pultneyville and Sodus, where the "Ontario" could not enter.<sup>16</sup>

The ship masters of the Genesee and other lake ports were becoming concerned about the sandbar off the mouth of the river. A succession of three dry seasons had so reduced the flow of the Genesee that the sand bar had shifted toward shore and cut the clearance from 12 to 6 feet by 1820, prompting several captains to petition the legislature for relief. A pier of logs and stone on the west side would, they urged, help the river clear its own channel at a cost of about \$2,700.<sup>17</sup> Their plea was redirected to the Federal Government which was tentatively considering the widespread need for river and harbor improvements. Action on the pier was delayed, but plans for a lighthouse were prepared and a substantial stone structure was erected by 1824.<sup>18</sup>

While the completion of these improvements was awaited, a serious blow to local shipping interests was received from the British Parliament. Long debate over the rights of American boats on the St. Lawrence resulted in the adoption of the Canadian Trade Act of 1822, which

limited American ships passing up and down the river to the transport of certain enumerated articles and exacted a duty for that privilege. American ships continued to serve the lake ports and sometimes made the run down to Quebec, but Canadian shippers enjoyed many advantages, including full cargoes on return trips, and thus the act which was in theory a liberal modification of mercantile traditions (never strictly enforced on the lake) served to curb the development of an American merchant marine on Lake Ontario.<sup>19</sup>

An increased number of Canadian ships put in at the Genesee port where more than a third of the 217 visitors of 1831 were of that registry.<sup>20</sup> Local exports continued to mount during the early twenties until the opening of the Erie Canal east from Rochester in late 1823 provided a vigorous competitor for the commerce of the area. It was partly to meet this competition that the list of enumerated articles was increased in 1825 and the duty on flour was abolished two years later. Work was commenced on the Rideau Canal in 1821 and on the Welland Canal four years later; the improvement of the St. Lawrence canals was rushed.<sup>21</sup> These measures gave a new stimulus to Lake Ontario's trade, supported, of course, by the rapid increase in the population of Upper Canada, but the Genesee port's share in that trade declined, as did its share of Rochester's exports now shifting to the canal, though the total-value of its lake shipments dropped but slightly.<sup>22</sup>

Various efforts helped to sustain the activity of the Genesee port. A second steamboat, the "Martha Ogden," built at Sackets Harbor in 1824 and owned in part by Rochester merchants, joined the "Ontario" in giving regular service between American ports. A family of boat builders located on the lower Genesee, where the first schooners built by the Rogers brothers began to appear in 1828 when the launching of the "Jeanette" attracted an enthusiastic crowd.<sup>23</sup> A horse-car railroad was built from Carthage Landing to Rochester with its southern terminal at the east end of the aqueduct. Before its gala opening in September 1823 the Federal Government had made considerable progress on the piers at the mouth of the river, and some \$90,000 was expended on this project in the five years ending in 1834 when the two piers, extending 2,876 feet into the lake, successfully breeched the sandbar.<sup>24</sup>

Despite its generally placid appearance, the great lake was often swept by storms that gave the early mariners many thrills and frequently brought disaster. The schooners were more often becalmed than wrecked, but at least a score met the latter fate during the 1830's.<sup>25</sup>

When the "Martha Ogden" was driven aground on Stony Point in 1832, its passengers and crew were saved by throwing a line to shore thus enabling rescuers to draw them over the surging waves in a basket. The engine was rescued, too, the next day and installed in the older "Ontario" which it served for the remainder of the season. The owners of these two boats had recently incorporated as the Lake Ontario Steamboat Company, with a capital of \$100,000, and they hastened the completion of a new and sturdier steamboat, the "United States."<sup>28</sup> The "Ontario," having survived several minor wrecks and frequent overhauls, was finally dismantled at Oswego late that year. More than a dozen other steamboats had been launched on the lake during its 15 years, as Captain James Van Cleve, who commanded several of them, including the "Ontario" for a time, later recalled, but most had been wrecked or sent down the river, and only four Canadian and two American steamers remained in service at the close of that year.<sup>27</sup>

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The opening of the Welland Canal in 1830 gave a great boom to Lake Ontario shipping,<sup>28</sup> but Rochester took only a minor part in the expanding trade of the upper lakes. Despite the improvement of its harbor and the addition of a light on the west pier, Rochester could not attract the trade drawn to Oswego by the completion of the Oswego Canal which made connections with the Erie in 1829.<sup>29</sup> A team of oxen was provided to help tow boats through the deep gorge below Carthage landing, where a rebuilt inclined railroad facilitated transshipment to Rochester, but these conveniences could not rival the advantages at Oswego. The three taverns built to accommodate travelers and boatmen at Carthage proved excessive, and two were soon converted to other uses, while the 60 or more houses which had sprung up in the settlement were annexed to the city at the time of its incorporation in 1834.<sup>30</sup>

The increased activity on the lake brought five steamboats regularly to the Rochester port each week for a few months in 1835, but as the trade did not justify the effort, one steamer skipped the Genesee stop in August, and only three made regular visits the next season.<sup>31</sup> Congress appropriated \$10,000 or more annually for harbor improvements—sums that seemed insignificant when contrasted with those spent at Oswego, Buffalo and most other ports—and a safe harbor was maintained, though little impetus was given to its trade. The boat tonnage owned and operated out of Rochester was only 408 in 1838, when

Oswego boasted 6,582 tons, and Buffalo 9,615.<sup>32</sup> Hosea Rogers and his brothers, who built several more schooners at the Carthage landing, sold most of them to merchants on the upper lakes.<sup>33</sup>

The number of clearances at the port in 1836 was 398, and the value of imports, \$235,701, now slightly exceeded the exports, yet our chief interest in these statistics springs from the fact that they were collected and recorded in a brochure issued by the newly-built Tonawanda Railroad, the first in western New York, which presented them as evidence of the trade it might help to carry inland.<sup>34</sup> Little did its promoters dream that within a decade a string of short railroads would be linked together across the state to serve as a competitor, not a feeder, to the trade of the lake as well as that of the canal.

Other changes were transforming the lake trade. By 1840 the steamboats visiting the Genesee each week exceeded the schooners in number, while the more efficient propellers began to replace the side wheelers. The handsome "Lady of the Lake" arrived in 1842, taking the place of the "United States," and stimulating a new interest in lake travel.<sup>35</sup> Trips across the lake to Toronto, Cobourg and Kingston, became more frequent, and pleasure excursions were announced, but the volume of freight picked up or landed at Rochester remained small, and the Genesee collector seldom received enough revenue in a month to pay half the cost of its collection.<sup>36</sup>

Rochester was uncertain in its attitude toward the tariff. Resolutions for and against increased rates attracted local support. Some favored reduced rates as a stimulus to trade; others favored protection and argued that increased revenues would enable the government to improve the port and thus stimulate exports. The adoption of a reciprocity treaty with Canada in 1854 was hailed by importers, notably the millers who now brought some of their wheat from Canada, but popular indifference to the subject revealed the lack of urgent import or export needs.<sup>37</sup>

The city's growth and the increased activity on the lake inevitably boosted the tonnage owned at Rochester, yet the 3,074 tons registered locally in 1846 scarcely equalled a fifth of Oswego's registration, while all Ontario ports were overshadowed by Buffalo on Lake Erie, now a major inland shipping center.<sup>38</sup> The abandonment of the horse car line to Carthage in 1838 brought a revival of the westside landing, now known as Kelsey's dock, at the foot of Buell Avenue. The projection of a steam road to Charlotte soon made it the principal port, though the road



was not completed until 1854.<sup>39</sup> The arrival of a new "Ontario," boasting superfine staterooms among other luxuries and equipped with propeller drive, stirred local enthusiasm in June 1848 and helped to dispel the gloom created by the near wreck of the "Niagara" which had swung precariously on the rocks not far from the Genesee throughout a stormy night that April.<sup>40</sup> A new interest in shipping was welling up at Charlotte, stimulated by the discovery that the river cleared its mouth of ice at an earlier date each spring than any other port on the lake, prompting several boats to winter there in order to get an early start. Several local men joined in a movement to organize a new American line of steamboats in 1853 and the old Fishers warehouse at Charlotte was remodeled as a grain elevator the next year.<sup>41</sup>

### The Port's Mid Years

The lake trade faced new competitive forces after the mid-century, and for several decades the many enterprising efforts to establish and maintain rival steamboat companies gave dramatic vitality to the Ontario ports. Railroads bordering the north and south shores, feeder railroads to the various harbors, commercial rivalries between the Ontario cities and their respective competitors, the American Civil War, even the Crimean War, the industrial revolution and a host of other factors influenced trade developments, while the emergence of a new interest in lake-side amusements increasingly overshadowed the commercial activity at the Genesee port.

The building of the Grand Trunk Railroad along the north shore of Lake Ontario in the early fifties dealt a severe blow to the Canadian shipping interests. The New York Central, consolidated on the American side in the same years, ran further inland and did not offer such direct competition, though it reenforced the Erie Canal in redirecting the state's growth toward the Hudson rather than the St. Lawrence. Thus the first efforts of the Central to reach the lake ports, with spurs to Lewiston in 1853 and to Charlotte the next year, proved mutually advantageous to its trade and to that of the Lake Ontario Steamboat Company which operated four large side-wheelers—the "New York," the "Ontario," the "Bay State" and the "Contract"—along the south shore on a daily schedule between Lewiston and Ogdensburg.

Rochester participated through Charlotte in this trade and in that of a newly formed International Steamboat Company organized in 1855 by Rochester and Toronto men to run two former Canadian-line boats,

the "Maple Leaf" and "Highlander," back and forth across the lake between Hamilton, Toronto, Rochester and Kingston. Its effort to continue operations into the winter months extended the shipping season a month or two during the late fifties but contributed in the end to its downfall.<sup>42</sup> Its rival, popularly known as the American line, added several Canadian steamers to its list and, under a new name, the Lake Ontario & St. Lawrence Steamboat Company, operated one line on the river between Kingston and Montreal and two others around the lake, one clockwise and one counter-clockwise.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the lake trade could not sustain such active service, and the company was unable to pay dividends on its \$500,000 stock. A reorganization was effected in 1859 with one company serving the southern ports from Lewiston to Kingston and another criss-crossing the lake and running down the St. Lawrence.<sup>44</sup>

The Rochester port enjoyed a favored position throughout these shifting developments, and new improvements were made at Charlotte to take advantage of the opportunities they presented. New stores and warehouses were erected in the mid-fifties and the grain elevator which collapsed in 1857 was rebuilt two years later. Hosea Rogers built several new schooners, one of which, the "Fairchild," 400 tons and valued at \$17,000, was described as the largest and finest ever built on the Genesee.<sup>45</sup> The celebration in its honor may have helped to erase the memory of the wreck of the "Fashion," another schooner which had vainly sought to reach the Genesee port during a storm two weeks before.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, the number of schooners putting in for trading purposes was declining, and while the commercial tonnage increased slightly, Charlotte's share did not rival that of Oswego, whose flour output challenged Rochester's supremacy in that field during the late fifties. Meanwhile Rochester's growth was served more directly by the canal and the railroads, and as most of the lake cargo it received came in on foreign ships, its congressman felt justified by 1860 in advocating home protection and a repeal of the reciprocity treaty.<sup>47</sup>

Some critics blamed the financial difficulties of the lake shippers on the large size and slow speed of the side-wheelers, four of which exceeded 800 tons, with the New York (1853), the largest, listed as 1200 tons and valued at \$100,000. The smaller Canadian boats, many driven by propellers, were more efficient and permitted more frequent stops at smaller ports, but the traveling public preferred the greater comfort and many luxuries of the large side-wheelers. Only on the St. Lawrence, where the exciting experience of running the rapids was

more safely undertaken by the small propellers, did those bouts attract passengers, and the shipping companies had to weigh these rival advantages against each other.<sup>48</sup>

The American line, with its heavy investment in large boats, gained an opportunity to unload during the Civil War. The critical need for army transports and other vessels created such a demand along the Atlantic coast that the "New York" was taken down the St. Lawrence rapids on the spring flood of 1861, to be followed shortly by the "Northerner" (905 tons), and by the smaller "Niagara" and "Maple Leaf" a year later. All passed the rapids and weathered the trip around Newfoundland in safety, and rendered useful service in the coastal waters despite the heavier seas they confronted there. The "Niagara" was finally condemned on Chesapeake Bay in its 19th year when its beams sprung after a trip on which it was seriously overloaded during a military movement; the "Maple Leaf" fell victim of a Confederate mine off the coast of Florida a year later.<sup>49</sup>

While the lake trade, particularly the passenger traffic, declined somewhat after 1862, a new interest in lake excursions supplied profitable employment to some boats. The "Ontario" made four such trips from the Charlotte port on July 4, 1863, and served with the "Cataract" as the mainstay of the American line's service along the southern shore throughout the war. The Canadian line, reorganized as the Royal Mail Line, provided cross-lake service between Rochester and Toronto and Cobourg with two, sometimes three, boats — the "Rochester," the "Empress" and in 1865 the steel-plated "Corinthian." This activity brought new demands for harbor improvements, and a new extension of the Charlotte piers was undertaken in 1865 at a cost of \$25,000.<sup>50</sup>

The Civil War relieved the financial burden on the shipping companies and created a new demand for Canadian supplies, thus stimulating trade across the lake. Curiously enough an earlier war in Crimea had created such an urgent demand for American foodstuffs that shippers of wheat and flour had turned to the railroads, further checking the east-west trade on Lake Ontario. The American line lost so much business because of these and other trade shifts that its backers were ready by 1868 to sell out to the Royal Mail Line. Yet the loss of the American line proved a benefit to Rochester, for the Canadian company chose the Genesee harbor as its major dry dock station, and both the "Ontario" and "Bay State" were overhauled there in the late sixties and rechristened the "Abyssinian," and the "Athenian" respectively.<sup>51</sup>

The plans of the Royal Mail Line to combine its trans-lake trade with service up and down the lake met a check in the seventies from an old restriction which excluded foreign ships from the American coastal trade. Canadian boats could not stop at more than one American port with profit, since they could not accept passengers or freight for exchange between them. The growth of the city of Rochester assured many stops at the Genesee port, but the restriction cut into its trade. The Oswego collector let it be known that he would wink at the enforcement of this old provision, but the company gave up the attempt to circumvent the regulation in 1874 and sold the "Athenian" and the "Abyssinian" to a St. Lawrence company and left the southern shore practically unserved.<sup>52</sup>

That decision was influenced by the progress of a new venture, the Lake Shore Railroad (later the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg) connecting Rochester with Oswego, Watertown and Ogdensburg.<sup>53</sup> American shipping interests made new efforts at this time to reestablish a south-shore line, and after several false starts the Rochester & Lake Ontario Navigation Company was organized in 1875. A line of steamers played up and down the lake under its management for the next few years. When the traffic proved disappointing, the company was absorbed by the Richelieu & Ontario Navigation Company, a Canadian firm which had progressively dominated the trade of the Richelieu, the St. Lawrence and by 1875 the Canadian side of Lake Ontario. Daily service was provided from Rochester to Toronto and Rochester to Cobourg by the "Toronto" and the "Norseman," while other boats served the other ports.<sup>54</sup>

Despite its opportunities, the Genesee port's trade fluctuated irregularly during these decades. The high import valuation of \$1,534,000 in 1855 was not again equalled during the period as the grain supply from the west was brought increasingly by rail. The exports likewise dropped off from the \$774,00 high of that Crimean War year, to as low as \$148,000 in 1879. An occasional flurry of activity was noted by the press, especially during the fruit harvest. Thus on August 24, 1872, a Rochester reporter counted 20 sails from the Charlotte docks as schooners laden with apples crowded the lower Genesee.<sup>55</sup> But it was not until coal shipments commenced to grow in the mid-seventies that Rochester found an export staple.

New Federal improvements to facilitate the movement of barges were required at this time. A building to house the life saving crew was erected in 1878, providing for its more permanent establishment.<sup>56</sup> An

octagonal light was built on the west pier in 1880 when the old stone lighthouse was abandoned. The pier light was moved forward when the piers were extended again a few years later, and repeated visits by the Federal dredges endeavored to maintain a 15-foot depth in the channel, though silt from the river and sand from the lake persistently formed shoals that cut the depth to 12 or even 10 feet.<sup>57</sup>

The coal trade, which began to grow in the seventies, gained a new impetus from the completion of the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburg Railroad in 1883. A. G. Yates, who had established a dock for coal barges in the mid-seventies, built a trestle three miles up river to permit the loading of his barges by gravity from B. R. & P. coal cars, and the coal shipments to Canada comprised 350,000 tons in 1890 when other exports totaled only 18,318 tons.<sup>58</sup> The eleven small steamers built on the lower Genesee during the previous decade, valued at \$90,000, were chiefly tugs or pleasure boats, for Rochester did not rival other ports in boat building.<sup>59</sup> Even the Charlotte Blast Furnace, opened in 1869, failed to supply the expected demand for freighting service, though its periodic operations helped to sustain the port's activity.<sup>60</sup>

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A popular new function was transforming Charlotte in these decades into a summer resort for the expanding city up the river. Glen House was built at the river's edge on the west bank below the lower falls in 1870 with a wooden stairway (later supplemented by an elevator) leading up to Maple Grove at the top of the gorge where the horse cars on Lake Avenue stopped. An excursion steamer, the "Falling Waters" made regular trips from the Glen House down the gorge to Charlotte for several seasons. The "Estelle" replaced the "Falling Waters" after it burned in 1875, and the "Flour City" joined it a few years later and made frequent excursions out into the lake, stopping at Sea Breeze a new resort at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay, or visiting the Thousand Islands where it, too, was burned in 1881. Other small steamers made their appearance, and in 1886 a new Rochester & Lake Ontario Steamboat Company was formed to manage this excursion trade. The company soon purchased the "Sylvan Stream" in New York and brought it up the St. Lawrence to join the fleet. This palatial boat, capable of carrying 800 excursionists, made daily trips for several summers from the Glen House or Charlotte into the lake or on longer excursions. Unfortunately the discharge of the east-side trunk sewer into the river below the falls in 1894 blighted the gorge as a recreation center, while the burning of

the Glen House that winter removed the chief agent of that function. The new electric trolleys had meanwhile reached Charlotte in 1889, making it the distribution center for five prosperous lake-side resorts—Ontario Beach Park, Manitou, Summerville, White City and Sea Breeze—which completely overshadowed the trade of its port by 1890.<sup>61</sup>

A revival of sailing for recreational purposes developed both on the lake and on the bay. The Genesee Yacht Club was organized at Charlotte in 1874, and boat clubs were formed on Irondequoit Bay, where several pleasure steamers also made their appearance in the seventies and later—the "Jennings," the "Glen Haven," the "Glen Edith," the "Island Queen," the "Bay View" among several others.<sup>62</sup> Yacht races on the bay gained favor but did not rival those on the lake where the Rochester Yacht Club (1886) staged its numerous regattas. So much enthusiasm was engendered by the sport that the club was able to capture the Canada cup from the Royal Canadian Yacht Club in 1899 and to contend successfully with that much older and more largely supported Toronto club during successive cup races for several years.<sup>63</sup>

Yet the resort hotels and amusement concessions, the excursion boats, yacht clubs and beaches, did not forestall other developments that helped to sustain the port's vitality. Indeed, 1891 proved to be the busiest year of the century with imports valued at \$911,933 and exports at \$884,249. The depression reduced these figures, but exports began to climb again in the late nineties and reached a high of \$1,279,000 in 1901 when the coal trade hit an early peak. The number of vessels arriving at Charlotte had practically doubled since 1880 and totaled 1278 in 1901-02. Although the exports fell off in subsequent years to \$134,000 in 1906, the imports rose again and reached a value of \$1,349,000 that year when 754 foreign and 220 American vessels visited Charlotte.<sup>64</sup>

### The Modern Lake Port

The Genesee port, long in fact the port of Rochester, did not receive that name officially until the annexation of Charlotte in 1917. Curiously enough, the trade developments of the previous decade had been more independent of the city's economy than in any preceding period, yet further improvement seemed to depend on the support only Rochester could give, while the expanding city was eager to draw the port more closely into its orbit. Increased trade, after the turn of the century, had prompted new studies of the port's potentialities, and repeated proposals for a St. Lawrence seaway intensified local interest in

such surveys. Rochester made several determined efforts to promote the port's activity and to plan for its expansion, yet the character of the city's economy failed in the end to sustain its trade and leaves it today chiefly a busy recreation center.

The project that gave the greatest impetus to the port's development during the past half-century was the Ontario Car Ferry. Incorporated at Ottawa in 1905 and jointly backed by the Grand Trunk and the B. R. & P. railroads, this \$500,000 enterprise launched its first ferry, the "Ontario I" in November 1907.<sup>65</sup> A ferry slip was built near the coal trestle some two miles up the river where the B. R. & P. trains could bump their coal cars onto the "floating freight yard" as the "Ontario I" was described. A sister ship, the "Ontario II" was soon added, and the two ferries carried passengers and other cargo, too, back and forth between Rochester and Cobourg winter and summer for nearly fifty years. But their chief function in the early decades was to deliver coal cars to the Grand Trunk—later the Canadian National Railroad—and to bring the empties back to Rochester.

The operation of the large car ferries spurred efforts to deepen the channel and make other harbor improvements. At the same time the Richelieu & Ontario Navigation Company, which continued to run the palatial "Toronto," built at a cost of \$300,000 in 1899 and able to sleep 430 passengers, and its younger but larger sister ship, the "Kingston," back and forth between these ports and Charlotte, brought a new and still larger steamer, the "Rochester," to the Genesee port in 1909 to serve the growing tourist trade between Rochester and the Thousand Islands, thus creating an urgent demand for a turning basin.<sup>66</sup> Considerable agitation prompted a survey of the port's needs by the United States Engineer in 1910. His recommendation, that the channel be deepened to 20 feet and maintained at that depth from the deep water in the lake into the lower harbor, was put into effect within the next two years, but local efforts to persuade the Federal authorities to extend the improvements upstream were unavailing.<sup>67</sup> The argument that more was spent at other ports was answered by citing the larger local investments made elsewhere. The Rochester Chamber of Commerce determined to take the lead in further improvements. A fund was raised to dredge a turning basin 600 feet in diameter at the southern end of the east pier for the convenience of the large steamers of the Richlieu line, which then reimbursed the Chamber. To help publicize the lake's potentialities, the Chamber staged a long series of annual two- or three-day excursions

for its own members in these years. The oft-proposed annexation of Charlotte was finally approved by the villagers in 1916 in order to secure the city's assistance in port improvements.<sup>68</sup>

Many grandiose schemes have intrigued the promoters of the Rochester port. The first proposal in the 1890's for a joint effort by the United States and Canada to open the St. Lawrence to seagoing vessels stirred discussion of the possibility of developing a major American port in Irondequoit Bay. Army engineers explored the bay at that time and on several later occasions but concluded each time that the existing improvements in the Genesee gave it the prior claim. Interest in the Irondequoit project revived locally in 1902 when a proposed Georgian Bay canal to connect that bay and the upper lakes directly with Toronto presented the enticing prospect that Rochester might replace Buffalo as the chief American port for western produce. Much attention was given to that prospect at this time by the Rochester Chamber and again when a ship railroad was substituted for the Georgian Bay canal.<sup>69</sup>

Since nothing came of these projects, Rochester centered its efforts on the further improvement of the river harbor. Although a plea for a \$500,000 appropriation by the Federal Government was rejected in 1916, local confidence was sustained by the promises of the Canadian Steamship Lines, Ltd., which had absorbed the Richelieu & Ontario Navigation Company the year before.<sup>70</sup> When it was discovered that the large terminal it planned to build at Charlotte would be for its exclusive use and would shut out the trade of a prospective rival, the Rochester Chamber persuaded the city to erect a municipal terminal instead. The project was delayed by the war and other interruptions; nevertheless the dock was ready for use in the 1921 season, and the spacious terminal erected on the site of the old blast furnace was completed at a total cost of \$275,000 the next spring.<sup>71</sup>

These varied improvements, Federal, private and now municipal, provided Rochester with an excellent harbor and brought increased activity during the 1920's. The combined tonnage of imports and exports, which had never quite reached 500,000 before 1901, had doubled in the next decade and slightly exceeded 1,500,000 tons by 1928. The major gain was in exports, chiefly coal, some in barges but most of it carried by the car ferries. The major imports were lumber, feldspar and pulpwood, and by the twenties the last item predominated. The number of passengers reached a high of 88,831 in 1927, many of them crossing and returning on the ferries, which now transported touring cars for the



convenience of interested patrons. Many travelers patronized the "Toronto" or the "Kingston" which the Canadian Steamship Lines continued to operate between those ports and Rochester throughout these years.<sup>72</sup>

The depression brought a sharp decline in the port's activity but its effect was thought to be temporary, and an earnest effort was made to speed a revival. A joint city and county Harbor Survey Committee was created to study the possible effect on Rochester of the St. Lawrence Seaway which was now gaining renewed consideration. Dr. R. E. MacElwee was engaged to make an engineering survey of the respective advantages of Charlotte, Long Pond and Irondequoit for future port development. A careful tabulation of the sums spent by the Federal Government on the Charlotte harbor showed a total in 102 years of only \$1,123,532 as contrasted with much larger sums at Oswego and most other lake ports. The city and private dock and dredging operations had added another \$1,493,027 to the river's improvements, but the narrow confines of the gorge and the limited space available for commercial expansion at Charlotte seemed to restrict its development as a major port.<sup>73</sup>

Much greater opportunities were available, MacElwee found both at Long Pond to the west and Irondequoit to the east. A modern harbor could be developed at the former for \$14,000,000, while the proper improvement of Irondequoit harbor would cost \$18,000,000 he estimated, but the opportunities for dry docks, boat storage, as well as the transshipment of goods, were much greater at Irondequoit. Detailed maps for its improvement were prepared and submitted to the Federal Government by the joint committee in 1932.<sup>74</sup>

The completion of the enlarged Welland Ship Canal in 1931 focused attention on the Rochester port. Its 25-foot channel and enlarged locks made it possible for the large tankers on the upper lakes to descend into Lake Ontario by-passing Buffalo and threatened to divert that rich trade to Canadian ports unless a suitable American port was provided. The possibility of transporting new automobiles by boat from Detroit to Rochester for cheaper shipment to eastern markets was stressed. Army engineers, who restudied the potentialities of the Rochester port in 1932, recommended that further developments be undertaken at Charlotte. Federal dredges should clear the channel to maintain a 20-foot depth into the lower harbor and in the turning basin, but the improvement of the river up to the proposed second turning basin and

coal ferry harbor should be left to the city and the interested companies.<sup>75</sup>

Rochester, which had already expended \$725,000 on river improvements, was not content with this recommendation. Gratification was expressed in 1935 when the Federal Government assumed the cost of maintaining the lower basin, but renewed appeals for greater improvements prompted a new study of the port's needs in 1939. Unfortunately the blighting effect of the depression had not yet been overcome. The value of Rochester's trade had dropped from a high of \$20,472,916 in 1929 to \$632,000 in 1937, and while the tonnage was beginning to rise again from the low of 489,000 tons in 1933 to 680,000 in 1937 it was still less than half the 1928 level. The passenger trade had declined 60 per cent, and was back up to 64,000 in 1937, but still the port's facilities were scarcely used to a tenth of their capacity and further expansion was not recommended.<sup>76</sup>

Again the outbreak of war brought a revival of lake trade. Exports, chiefly coal, climbed to nearly 1,500,000 tons by 1948, and the imports to 270,000 tons. The number of vessels listed as entering and leaving the Port of Rochester had dropped to 522, chiefly because the car ferries, which still maintained a busy schedule, were no longer officially entered on each trip following a new interpretation of the rules in 1946. The ferries carried passengers as in the past and often loaded as many touring cars as coal cars in summer months. But the increased number of automobiles on the expanding network of highways north as well as south of the lake was diverting the tourist trade on which the Canadian Steamship Lines had long depended, and while its large steamboats likewise ferried many touring cars for the accommodation of their passengers, the latter were declining in number, and the "Toronto" was withdrawn from the service in September 1938, leaving only the "Kingston" to carry passengers east and west from the Rochester port.<sup>77</sup>

The urgency of the war-time trade and the danger that the port might suffer from the declining interest of local enterprise prompted the Federal Government to move finally in 1945 to assume full responsibility for dredging the river channel up to the ferry harbor and to undertake costly repairs on the west pier.<sup>78</sup> Thus the harbor has been maintained at an annual cost often in excess of \$50,000, while the pre-war decline in its trade has resumed. The imports have dropped off steadily to less than 7,000 tons in 1953, and although coal shipments have declined only 40 per cent, the Ontario Car Ferry has finally suspended operations, withdrawing the "Ontario I" in August 1949 and the

"Ontario II" the next April. The Canadian Steamship Lines likewise withdrew the "Kingston" in September 1949 shortly before the company's final dissolution, thus bringing all regular passenger service at the Rochester port to an end.<sup>79</sup>

Some 300 or more coal barges and occasional freighters still enter and clear at the Rochester Port each year, but the major activity today, especially in this year of the revival of the races for the Canada's cup, is supplied by pleasure boats. Sleek and graceful yachts of all sizes up to the 75-foot schooner, "Widgeon II" owned by Mr. Frank Gannett, may be seen tacking in and out of the Rochester harbor almost any fine summer day. The largest concentration is to be found in the basin of the Rochester Yacht Club whose 400 members own 65 sailing craft and 27 motor boats. The Genesee Yacht Club has another concentration of boats and many more are berthed at private docks along the river which shelters, according to a Coast Guard estimate, some 300 sailboats, 200 power-driven cabin cruisers, and over 400 smaller power boats. Indeed the activity of these pleasure craft has increased so greatly during the past five years that the emergency calls received by the Coast Guard have jumped from 60 to over 100 annually during that period.<sup>80</sup>

Among all racing events on the Great Lakes, that for the Canada's cup has acquired priority, and great excitement marked the sailing of the tenth series this past July. After seven triumphs for Rochester boats over the past 55 years, the Rochester Yacht Club's entry, the "Iskareen" was finally defeated 3 to 1 by the "Venture II" from Toronto, the Royal Canadian Yacht Club's challenger, which thus takes the cup for a third time.<sup>81</sup>

The loss of the Canada's cup will scarcely dampen the enthusiasm of Rochester's numerous yachtsmen and will have no effect on the port's trade. A more significant event from the commercial angle was the recent arrival of a Scottish steamer, the "Lunan," bringing cement from Newfoundland. While the importation of cement to an American city was jokingly described by the captain as comparable to carrying coal to Newcastle, the possibility of bringing in a bulky product from abroad when the normal source was shut off illustrates one of the port's basic advantages.<sup>82</sup> Fortunately the spacious municipal terminal stands ready to perform such services on call as well as to unload and store the several thousand tons of newsprint that have comprised the major imports of the last few years. These imports have dropped, as we have seen, to less than \$1,000,000 in annual value and scarcely equal a seventh of

the value of the port's exports. The shipments of coal have declined less precipitously, yet the export of 868,000 tons in 1953 had no more direct relation than in the past to the city's industrial life.<sup>83</sup>

Rochester's own exports and the great majority of its imports have fluctuated upwards over the years, with little relation to the activity of its port, for they have been shipped by rail and air and have come in under bond by the same routes. Thus the direct exports of 117 of the city's leading manufacturers, valued at \$10 million in 1922, rose to \$22 million by 1929 and, after a drop in the early years of the depression, climbed again to \$30 million by 1941 and to \$57 million by 1947, dropping off slightly in 1948, the last year for which the statistics were compiled.<sup>84</sup> The World Trade Committee of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, which gathered these statistics, estimated that indirect exports and those of firms not included in the survey would add approximately \$8 million to the value of the city's exports during the late forties.<sup>85</sup>

The city's imports under bond have likewise fluctuated over the years. The customs receipts at Rochester have averaged approximately 60 per cent of the total receipts of the Rochester District, comprised of 23 counties, and amounted to \$1,171,319 in 1923 and rose to \$1,818,371 in 1928. They dropped off to a low of \$426,525 in 1933 but climbed back to a million by 1936 and have hovered around that figure ever since. These duties are dependent, of course, on the tariff rates, and the imports have fluctuated upwards in recent decades independently of the fairly constant revenues. Thus the city's imports under bond rose from approximately \$1,500,000 in 1933 to nearly \$10,000,000 in 1944 and after a dip in the late forties have again approached that figure in the last few years.<sup>86</sup>

This is big business of great importance to the city's economy. Not only do the exports comprise approximately 8 per cent of the city's industrial output, but the imports also supply items essential to the production of many if not all of its firms. The possibility that an increased part of this commerce may be shipped directly to or from Rochester by water through the St. Lawrence Seaway presents an opportunity to cut transportation costs which may prove advantageous in the years ahead. Of course the tonnage and volume of both imports and exports are small because of the specialized character of Rochester's products and the shipping they would require is also slight. However, the additional possibility that the same water route will bring ores and other

bulky products to Rochester cheaply opens new opportunities for the city's industrial growth.

Thus the future of the Port of Rochester is unpredictable, awaiting the decision of its leaders and the enterprise of its merchants and industrialists. Already the Chamber of Commerce has created an Inland Waterways Committee headed by Carey H. Brown to study the possible effects of the seaway on Rochester and to recommend action. The fact that the facilities of the port today stand largely unused and can accommodate many times its present trade does not supply the final answer, for if the new commerce requires a deeper channel and larger turning basins, Rochester will fail to attract it without such improvements. Whether the port on the Genesee will meet this need or a new development is required on more expansive Irondequoit Bay are engineering problems and again the Army engineers are studying the situation. Probably their recommendation, as in the past, will be based on the success of the local community, both public and private, in developing an active commerce sufficient to justify Federal expenditures for its safe maintenance and development. Fortunately it is thus left to Rochester to decide whether it wants the kind of industries needed to sustain the commerce of a large seaport and whether it wants them sufficiently to compete with Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit and a dozen other cities already eagerly planning such developments. We must write our own ticket in this as in most other fields of local history.

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