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Rebuilding Rochester and Remembering Its Past

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

As the passing of old friends inspires affectionate memories, so the wrecking of old landmarks sharpens our interest in their historic lore. Thus, busy reporters have paused frequently in recent months to write obituaries for the numerous old structures now tumbling in the Third Ward and elsewhere about the city as Rochester moves forward. Many young scholars from schools in the area have requested information on the changing city for class themes, while a group of social studies teachers recently arranged a tour in an effort to recapture some of the old town's fleeting traditions before it is too late. Scarcely a year ago a visitor from far-off Lisbon made a sightseeing trip about the city's modernization projects. After viewing some of the doomed buildings and examining the architect's renderings of proposed new structures, he congratulated Rochester on its vitality but warned that "few cities have been able to recreate the charm of the old days in their modernized districts." Perhaps we should pause, not only for a backward glance at the lore of our crumbling mansions, but also, by a reappraisal of the forces producing change, to recapture if we can some of the graciousness Rochester once possessed.

The first discovery we make is that the brick and stone buildings tumbling about us today were not the original occupants of their sites. Most of them, in fact, belonged to the third or fourth generation of structures to come and go in the city's rapidly moving history. The curious resident needs but to glance at the excellent historical model of part of the still older Rochester of 1838, on permanent display at

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the Museum of Arts and Sciences, to discover that only one of the many buildings depicted there remains standing today. Even that one historic shrine, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, built in 1824, replaced an earlier frame chapel on the same site. Those who pause to read the marker in front of the Board of Education building, next door to this church, learn that it is the third school house on that lot. Across the street the Court House, now more than sixty years old, is the third to occupy what was once a truly spacious court house square. Soon (as history moves) it will surrender its functions (or at least part of them) to the new Civic Center buildings to arise on a more adequate site a block further south

The River Banks

One demonstration of the transient character of our successive structures of wood, brick and stone stumped the experts a few years ago. Many sidewalk superintendents will recall the twelve massive stone arches uncovered during the excavation for the foundations of the new Rochester War Memorial. The arches, arranged in two groups, each standing four in a row with two at right angles at one end, had apparently formed part of the foundations of two large buildings antedating the Kimball tobacco factory. No one could remember any mention of those long-forgotten structures, and no sure records of their character or dates have yet been found. Perhaps the press account of a fire which destroyed a large stone mill belonging to William Campbell in June, 1831, and seriously gutted the nearby Aqueduct House owned by Jonathan Child related to these structures. Erected two years before and not otherwise reported in our records, these fire victims may have been the forgotten occupants of the island which later supported a number of smaller buildings before the site was cleared for the Kimball tobacco factory erected there in 1881. The traditions of that last building will long be remembered because of the familiar skyline statue of Mercury perched atop its tall smokestack tower; someday, we trust, Mercury will rise again to resume his 65-year vigil over the changing Rochester scene.

Fortunately the historical antecedents of most downtown buildings are more easily traced than those on the island now merged with the mainland. The massive stone aqueduct, for example, one of the oldest structures in the city, dates from 1837-1842 when it was completed

just in time to replace its crumbling predecessor which crossed the river slightly down stream. That first aqueduct, hailed at its opening in 1823 as the most remarkable stone arch bridge in America, had provided the keystone of Rochester's early prosperity. The bustling village, then scarcely a decade old, had grown up at both ends of the bridge which crossed the river a hundred rods further north. The advantage of ample water power from the small upper falls, south of the aqueduct, and at the main falls, a few blocks to the north, had prompted the settlement of a milltown. Moreover the river had brought the produce of a fertile valley on rafts and scows during flood seasons to the flour and lumber mills at the falls. The only drawback had been the long wagon haul to the lake port several miles further north, but the opening of canal trade to the east in 1823 provided Rochester with an ideal and cheap route to Albany and New York and transformed the bustling village into America's first boom town.

Thus the arrival of the canal stimulated the first effort to rebuild Rochester. The original Main Street bridge, a wooden structure which had frequently been threatened and sometimes damaged by ice flows in winter and floods in the spring or fall, was replaced in 1824 by a second wooden bridge supported this time on stone piers. Hundreds of eager settlers, moving westward on the canal, stopped off here to find jobs in the new mills and cooper shops or in the boat yards and rope walks that sprang up along the Erie. Many of them built small frame cottages on the residential lots which lined every street except Main (then Buffalo), State (then Carroll) and Exchange (then Mill), where the crude shacks and cabins of the pioneers were already giving way to frame shops and hotels of two or three stories.

The sprawling village quickly became so tightly built up that farmers who drove in with market wagons could find no place to stand and sell their produce. The growing town needed a public market, and to provide it the village fathers built a platform out over the river at the north-west corner of the bridge in 1827. Thus the village set a precedent which soon prompted the construction of other buildings over the river along the northern side of the bridge and supplied Rochester with the first version of one of its most unique features.

The millers, who occupied both banks of the river south of the bridge, opposed this development. They feared that the bridge would, in flood seasons, become a dam and spread the high waters onto their

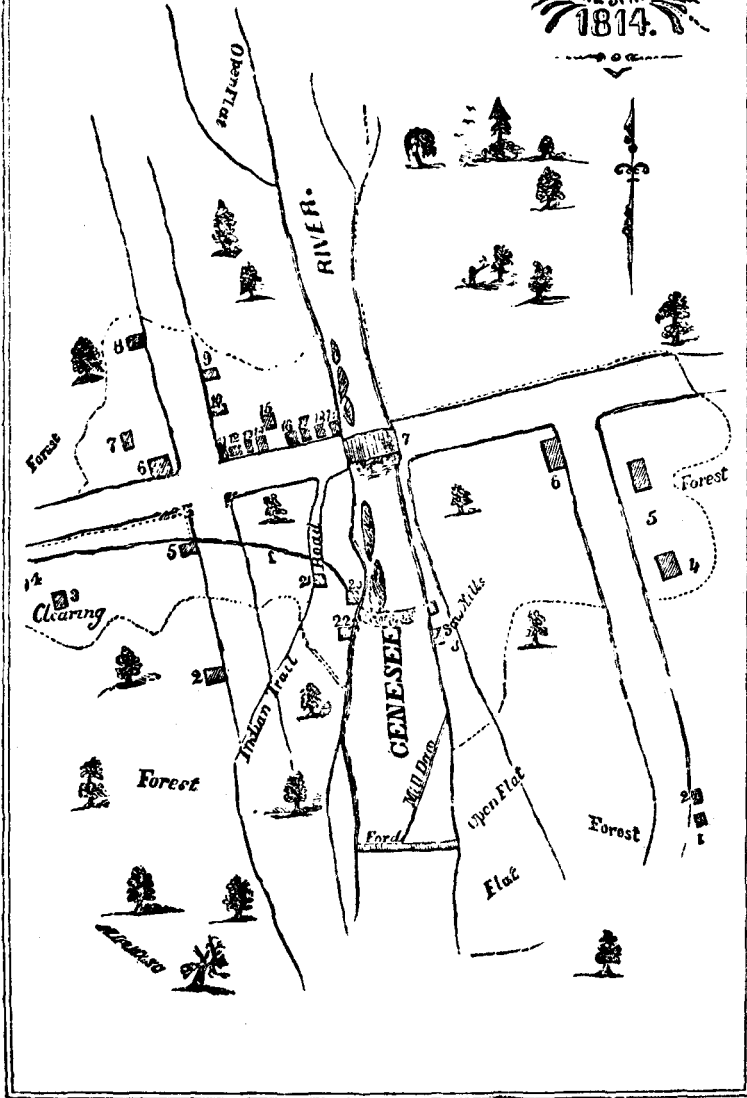
properties. However, the first disaster came from a fire which broke out in the market building early in 1834 and swept through the low wooden buildings lining the northern edge of the bridge and gutted the stone building recently completed on the eastern bank. A second row of frame buildings soon arose on the north side of the bridge, only to be seriously damaged and partly washed away during a flood two years later. Repairs were quickly undertaken, but a second flood a few months later convinced the city fathers (for Rochester had become a city that spring) that a new bridge at a higher level was needed. After some delay, the third Main Street bridge was completed in September, 1838, and a new row of shops, mostly two stories high, appeared along its northern edge.

The higher level of the third bridge required a new level in Buffalo Street to the west and prompted merchants and tradesmen to replace the frame structures, which had served well enough in earlier days, by more substantial brick buildings. Property owners bordering the river on the west bank north of Buffalo Street raised the level of their lots and of the river lane which now became known as Front Street. Several of the new buildings erected there in these years are still standing—a quaint reminder of the Flour City of the early 1840's. How long they will continue to stand is an open question at this writing. While they have outlived several ambitious plans for the reconstruction of the Front Street area, a new proposal is now under study for the rebuilding of the entire west bank.

There, indeed, is an area rich in local history. However, most of its landmarks have long since passed into oblivion—old Corinthian Hall, a firetrap, yet the center of Rochester's cultural life for several decades after its opening in 1849; Rattlesnake Pete's "museum" with its live and stuffed curiosities; the Front Street playground, cradle for many of Rochester's recreational traditions, which opened in 1908 on a site previously used as a haymarket—the gas storage depot of its day—and before that for the town's first armory, where local recruits for the Civil War received their early training. Who will shed a tear if the crumbling remains of this once proud district are swept aside and replaced by hotels and shops worthy of the business center of a modern metropolis!

But let us take another look at Main Street bridge. The one we know, although old enough as structures in Rochester go, is the fourth

MAP
of
ROCHESTER
IN THE SPRING OF
1814.



on the site. The third bridge finally became inadequate and was condemned in 1854, yet nearly three years were required to replace it with the stone arch bridge now standing. Perhaps few in Rochester today realize that this century-old structure rests on stone arches, for the three-and-four story brick buildings erected on piers along both its north and south sides have extended subbasements down into the arches giving the bridge a flat appearance.

Here is another landmark that has survived several proposed reconstructions. Almost every local planner has redesigned it on paper. The Wilgus plan of 1908 to relocate the New York Central station, not at its present site but over the river at the brink of the falls, proposed the demolition of all buildings on the north side of Main Street bridge and along the river banks below it, thus creating an open river basin that would extend to the new Central station, with new commercial buildings lining the east side of Water Street and the west side of Front Street designed in the French Renaissance style with arcaded sidewalks reminiscent of Paris or the White City at Chicago. This noble dream was soon shattered by the location of the station at its present site where, incidentally, a distinguished building for its day, and still an interesting one, was dedicated in 1914.

Meanwhile Rochester's first comprehensive city plan, submitted by the famous Brunner and Olmsted team in 1911, redesigned Main Street bridge on the model of the Ponte Vecchio of Florence, with an opening at the center on both sides to permit Mainstreeters to catch a glimpse again of the river. Perhaps the questionable merits of those views at the time discouraged action, but certainly the southern vista should become an attractive one within the next half-dozen years as the towering structures in the civic center begin to rise beyond the War Memorial. Possibly, one of these days, even Main Street bridge will receive a modern face lifting, both front and back, that will not only restore its sight but also bring it into stylist harmony with the mid-twentieth century.

The Third Ward

While few tears will be shed if the march of progress clears out some of these crumbling relics along the river, many citizens have watched the advance of the new Thruway system into downtown Rochester with alarm. The swath cut across the old Third Ward has

brought the greatest sorrow though, fortunately, a few elegant old mansions have so far been saved. Of course the Inner Loop is only one of the major forces disturbing that historic district today. The new civic center is commandeering a wide area, and who will begrudge it sufficient space to give the future public buildings not only parking facilities but ample position and appropriate landscaping as well! Most of the twenty-six acres to be cleared have already suffered such decay that two of the one-time mansions—which in their heyday housed some of Rochester's most distinguished citizens—had fallen so far before their demolition that, where four families formerly dwelt in gracious comfort, some ninety or more individuals were crowded into cramped and bleak cubicles. The preservation of these tenements could hardly do honor to either Leonard Jerome, grandfather of Winston Churchill, or to Lewis H. Morgan, whose library, once the intellectual center of Rochester, had become the squalid domicile of five couples.

The sad fate of the old Third Ward is of course symbolic of the urban decay near the central business districts of most growing cities. The same decay is apparent in several other sections of Rochester where the prospects for new developments are not as bright as they are here. The new Civic Center, while it cannot reproduce the quaint charm of the district's past, will we trust have a modern splendor of its own and civic amenities in which future Rochesterians can take a healthy pride.

As is already apparent, the rise of the new Civic Center will hasten the transformation of the rest of the ward. The decline of its early residential character has long been in process. Many of the old mansions were converted decades ago to institutional use. The Rochester Institute of Technology, originally the Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute, was one of the first to appear and began as early as 1892 to acquire several old homesteads for classroom use. After decades of fluctuating growth, it has recently entered a new era of expansion and has taken over for present occupancy or for future needs a large number of the houses and lots to the west of the Civic Center. A few fine old mansions and several of their more modest neighbors have already been demolished in this process and others are apparently fated to go, but fortunately two at least have been saved.

Yet saving an old mansion requires a special effort, for in most cases the original residential use has long since been superseded. Thus the magnificent Jonathan Child mansion early became a faculty center

for the newly established University of Rochester in the 1850's, later a select club house, then a choice boarding house, and finally the home of the Fourth Christian Science Society of Rochester. The Reynolds mansion served as the home of the Reynolds Library for several decades after 1895 and later sheltered the Red Cross and other civic functions for a time.

The Livingston-Backus house, at the corner of Livingston Park and Spring Street, was better known as the Livingston Park Seminary which it housed for many decades. After the school closed in 1934 the Gospel Mission acquired the building for its services. When the expanding Institute of Technology purchased this property, as a part of the site for its new gymnasium, the architectural distinction of this Federal-style structure prompted the Rochester Historical Society and the Society for the Preservation of Landmarks in Western New York to combine in a joint effort to preserve the tooled woodwork and such other portions as will be useful in a later reconstruction.

The Ely-Osgood mansion at the other end of Livingston Park stands almost alone amidst the changes of recent years about it. Across Troup Street the Kimball mansion, most pretentious in the Third Ward, came down in 1948, and now most of its old neighbors on the park have disappeared. Still the weighty dignity of the Ely mansion's Doric-temple style preserves some of the atmosphere of the milling generation which gave Rochester its start. The succession of professional men, who dwelt there after the Elys, enriched its traditions, and since 1920 the Irondequoit Chapter of the DAR has maintained headquarters there. The chapter's recent decision to undertake a complete restoration job, with the aid of the Landmark Society, assures the preservation of this historic mansion.

Another choice example of Greek temple architecture is the Campbell-Whittlesey house, the property since 1937 of the same Landmark Society. This stately mansion with its fluted columns and Ionic capitals has been carefully restored in the best taste of its day and welcomes visitors daily, one to five, except Mondays. Fortunately the Inner Loop, by a slight deviation in its route, has permitted the continued preservation of this mansion and, by improving the view, has made it a more prominent landmark of Rochester's past. If two or three of the other distinguished houses and elegant mansions still standing but soon to be cleared from the Civic Center and the R.I.T. grounds could be

moved to appropriate sites near the Whittlesey house, what remains of South Fitzhugh Street might be reconstructed in such a way as to preserve some of the early city's best architectural traditions.

Of course the architecture of the Third Ward, despite its scattered splendors, was not its chief glory. It was a neighborhood in the true sense of that term, and the social life developed by its old families, as described, years ago, by Charles Mulford Robinson and more recently by Virginia Jeffrey Smith, was its most noteworthy accomplishment. Perhaps there was an element of clannishness involved, for the natives welcomed newcomers with some reserve, yet many of the latter were so delighted with the friendly atmosphere that years could pass before they detected any limitations of warmth. An impecunious teacher such as Dr. Charles Forbes, who reared a large family in a small house of nondescript style, was as respected in the neighborhood as the occupants of imposing mansions a few doors away. Only a limited number of the yards had stables in back, for most families in the ward got along very well without carriages or borrowed one with perfect ease when needed.

It is this quality of neighborliness, developed by the old families who lived here for successive decades, that is the city's chief loss with the passing of the old Third Ward. No bulldozers are responsible for this loss, for the decline or removal of its old families commenced a half century ago, and the rapid population shifts of recent decades have made it increasingly difficult for the few remaining old timers to develop a wide enough circle of friendly neighbors to maintain a pervasive social atmosphere. Yet this tradition of neighborliness is the heritage we should cherish most as we witness the new transformations in the ward and the city at large.

Other Rochester neighborhoods have had their friendly ties centered around a community church or school or based on a common experience or background, but the Third Ward transcended such mundane conditions. Indeed the variety of its church affiliations and of its independent educational ventures could scarcely have been exceeded. St. Luke's Episcopal Church, now restored to full view because of the demolition of Old Fitzhugh Hall, more recently the Colony restaurant, next door, and First Presbyterian, whose original building on the site of the City Hall burned down in 1869 (the present edifice, which will overlook the new Civic Center, was dedicated in 1872), were the first

to serve this area. Others followed, notably old Plymouth Church erected in 1854 and demolished on the eve of its centennial. The fervent evangelism of the founders of this church gave place to an equally fervent reformism a half century later, and the old structure sheltered in its last decade still another widely different religious faith—that of the Spiritualists who, moreover, could claim the Third Ward as practically their birthplace.

This variety of religious experience was matched by the multiplicity of schools fostered in the area: three female seminaries, two boys academies, three public schools (one of which became the first city High School), and the University of Rochester which (though located, like the High School, slightly beyond the ward's northern boundary) looked there for support and students and for accommodations for its faculty. These and other instances of divergent experiences available to residents of the ward nurtured an individualism that both gave and received respect and raised the neighborliness of this community to a high plane.

Other Downtown Demolitions

The Third Ward is only one of the areas where the wheels of progress are leveling old landmarks. Few laments impeded the contractors on the first segment of the Inner Loop as they ripped out the old Savoy hotel (successor to the Waverly House which served Rochester's original railroad station on Mill Street in the 1850's) and swung southwest through the succession of old shops and warehouses that once occupied its route. This capacious new traffic artery and the new parking garage the city is building on the Loop's outer rim at West Main Street promise new convenience to the business and governmental activities west of the Four Corners. Already plans have been announced for new structures here, and the demolition of old buildings on the chosen sites has commenced.

The passing of the old Rochester Savings Bank building calls for a moment of silent mourning, for here was perhaps the second most important nesting place for the city's early cultural institutions. Erected in 1855-57, its second and at the time top floor, covered by a shallow dome, served as the sorting room for Professor Henry A. Ward's scientific collections after his first lengthy trip abroad. When Ward's rocks and other artifacts had been classified and removed, the large room be-

came for a few years the exhibit and reception hall for the recently established Academy of Music and Art. The Athenaeum Library replaced the academy there in 1869 and was itself displaced by the Rochester Club, the city's first social club, in 1874. A third story (as viewed from the outside) with a still higher dome was added a decade later, and here in 1888 the Chamber of Commerce got its start. The Chamber generously shared one room with the exhibits of the reorganized Historical Society and provided the setting where in 1890 the city first honored Susan B. Anthony with a public reception on her 70th birthday.

The new bank to arise here will incorporate the modern drive-in feature and provide a limited parking area to accommodate the motor age. A similar improvement by the Lincoln-Rochester Trust Company at its Four Corners branch will open a new vista on the west side of Exchange Street—at the cost, however, of two additional history-laden structures. Across Exchange Street, most of the century-old buildings erected in the palmy days of the Erie Canal have finally disappeared. Only the building at the corner of Exchange and Broad, originally owned by William Fitzhugh, dates back that far. The Wilder Building at the Four Corners, the city's first authentic skyscraper, which reared its head eleven stories high in 1888 and thus overshadowed the still more historic Powers Block across the way, begins to appear more isolated than ever.

What will happen to this old district, bounded by Main, Exchange, Broad and the river—the historic heartland of Rochester's industrial and commercial life—is anybody's guess. Here the pioneer mills (1789-179?) of Ebenezer Allen were followed in 1815 by the first Rochester and Ely mills and then by a long succession of flour and lumber mills powered by the Rochester, Fitzhugh and Carroll race. The arrival of the Erie prompted the conversion of the millyard into a canal harbor, known as Child's basin, where freighters could line up at the base of the mills to take on lumber or flour while the packets docked behind the commercial buildings and taverns that arose on Exchange (formerly Mill) Street. All of these activities ceased decades ago, long before the Erie gave way in 1919 to the Barge canal. Child's basin was filled in and paved during the 1870's when printers began to take over the water power rights and sites along the old race. Most of Rochester's many newspapers—dailies, weeklies and monthlies (even this

quarterly)—were published at one time or another in this district where the Democrat and Chronicle, the Lawyers Cooperative and one or two smaller printers still carry on. The canal boats, however, have long since given place to automobiles which now appropriate the major part of the area.

Further south on Exchange Street, old historic buildings have fallen on every side. Among those demolished for the War Memorial was an oft-remodeled structure used in the early days as a theater, amusement center and exhibit hall, thus providing antecedents for its modern successor. On the west side of Exchange, the red-brick, mansion-type home of the Rochester Children's Nursery, formerly the Rochester Industrial School, has been sold to the city for temporary court use. This structure, the oldest charity building still standing in the city, will soon make way for the Civic Center, as have its lesser neighbors, including one quaint old building, part of which dated from the 1850's, where the Stein Manufacturing Company made luxury caskets, for more than half a century.

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The bulldozers of the Inner Loop have only in recent months moved to the east side of the river, and, fortunately, few of the buildings now in their path inspire historic memories. Nevertheless, the march of progress here presents serious community problems, and opportunities too, if we will seize them, for the neighborhood now being traversed is a populous one jammed, as a recent study by the Council of Social Agencies discovered, by people who for the most part have been unable to find other more desirable accommodations. Indeed the situation dates back to the original plotting of the Manhattan tract which was laid out in the 1860's into 30-foot lots that never attracted wholesome development. The promoter, whose greed ultimately led to his own bankruptcy, left his progeny of mean little houses scattered through the area blighting even the more substantial structures built on double or triple lots. Rochester's first attempt at a sociological survey was made in this area in 1910, and the city's first detailed plan for slum clearance and urban redevelopment, sponsored by the University of Rochester in 1944, likewise centered here. No action resulted from either study, but if the people displaced from the 160 houses condemned for the next lap of the Inner Loop can be more happily located without adding to

the congestion of other deteriorated areas, the city will profit in more ways than one.

Perhaps the unfortunate traditions of this district, which incidentally will not be eradicated entirely by the Inner Loop, stand out more prominently because they have long been out of step with the more progressive improvements elsewhere on the east side. East Main Street early developed a tradition of periodic renovation and reconstruction. Stimulated by a succession of destructive fires after the turn of the century, it gradually pulled ahead of the West Main and State Street shopping center and within the past decade has pressed modernization efforts east beyond the twelve corners. Both Clinton and East Avenues have undertaken similar improvements for short distances, catering to the quality trade that insists on driving at least to the back door to shop.

But the new buildings of the last decade in this entire section have been less striking than the demolitions. The new Woolworth store which replaced the old Whitcomb House on Main and Clinton Streets in 1947 and the new home of the Monroe County Savings Bank at Main and Andrews were the most recent additions to Rochester's main stem. Among the numerous landmarks that have come down on Clinton and South Avenues and other side streets, most of them making way for parking lots, was the Temple Theater erected in 1909 and popular for two decades as a vaudeville house and later as a center of motion pictures. Its recent demolition like that of the more famous Lyceum Theater across the street in 1934, brought a final end to the familiar lines of theater patrons on South Clinton, though in fact these once-gay and jostling crowds had disappeared long before the buildings themselves, and many of the cars that park here during the day may be found at one or another of the six drive-in theaters on the city's outskirts in the evening.

* * * * *

The automobile is of course the crux of the problem in Rochester's down-town business district. The dual task of keeping it moving freely and permitting it to park conveniently has prompted the construction of the Inner Loop and the opening of innumerable parking lots. Unfortunately the hit-or-miss method of satisfying the latter need—by tearing down abandoned buildings to save taxes and converting these scattered lots to parking use—has gutted wide areas of the east side shopping district. The city's decision six years ago to take the initiative in clear-

ing a number of parking areas sufficiently close to the center for convenience, but far enough out to abet rather than destroy realty values, has already provided off-street metered parking for 730 cars, boosting the total downtown parking facilities slightly above 14,000.

Meanwhile the flight of the small independent retailers (who rushed in to develop Clinton Avenue and other side streets with the arrival of the trolley cars in the 1890's and who have now removed in large number to the twenty-six or more off-street shopping centers that have sprung up on the city's outskirts) has left vast areas into which a sea of cars flows and ebbs daily both north and south of the department and specialty stores along Main Street and its tributaries. A committee of the Civic Development Council proposed, several years ago, that carefully planned and landscaped parking courts be developed here, but so far little has been accomplished.

The rivalry between the east and the west sides of Rochester, which became most intense around the turn of the century, can now be viewed objectively since most of the crucial contests have already reached a decision. Both sides shared some functions from the start, and recent losses in such cases have not been to the downtown rival but to the outlying wards or suburbs. Thus in the matter of churches, the early concentration of a dozen edifices along Fitzhugh and Plymouth Streets on the west side was fully matched east of the river before the Civil War, but, in spite of repeated relocations and new building projects within these down town districts, each has seen more than half its churches move to the outskirts.

The east side attracted the Chamber of Commerce across the river in the late nineties, a decade after the New York Central had opened its second station on St. Paul Street; the third station, as we have seen, moved a block further east; the Post Office moved over in 1930 and the Public Library in 1936; but old Convention Hall, in the form of its much grander successor, the War Memorial, has reversed the trend. With the location of the main portion of the Civic Center on the west bank of the river, a new and stable division of functions seems to have been achieved.

The two districts continue of course to share some functions—hotels and theaters, banks and office buildings—though the decentralization that has occurred in the retail trade has invaded all but perhaps the last of these fields. While the leading down-town hotels have each

undertaken extensive renovations in recent years, they have not tried to keep pace with the expanding needs of travelers, and a score of new tourist courts have sprung up on the city's periphery to accommodate those who like to sleep with their car under the pillow or very near it. The opening of the Treadway Inn on lower East Avenue has made this privilege attractive even to those who wish to stop in closer proximity to the city's downtown facilities, or to reduce the friction of space, as the sociologists would put it.

While the central district has extended some of its facilities into the outlying wards, even into the towns, it still maintains leadership and superior service in most of its traditional lines. Department stores and banks, the Public Library and the Post Office, all have branches scattered over the city and the county, but the serious scholar, like the man seeking a loan, heads for the main office downtown. The four major youth associations have branches, too, but again it is at their central headquarters that their principal activities take place, and it is interesting to note that each has, within the last four decades, built a modern plant near the population center which now falls at or near the central Post Office.

The principal theaters, music halls, fraternal headquarters and social club houses have been located slightly to the east of that center for several decades, and most of them will fall just outside the eastern rim of the Inner Loop when it is completed a few years hence. In similar fashion the Art Gallery erected in 1912 on the old University of Rochester campus and the Museum of Arts and Sciences opened in 1942 on East Avenue supply eastern poles of attraction, but the action of the University of Rochester in consolidating its undergraduate colleges on the river campus to the south has created a diversionary trend.

Decentralization and Its Effects

The outward migration of former downtown functions has of course been going on for over a century. The University—not properly a downtown institution—moved first from its original home in a building still standing on West Main Street to its Prince Street campus in 1861 and commenced to develop its River campus as a men's college in 1925; the final consolidation of both undergraduate branches there this year conforms, however, with the outward trend of other urban activities.

The Rochester Theological Seminary made similar moves, its second more quickly, in 1932, and as the Colgate Rochester Divinity School stands today on a hill top site a mile east of the River Campus. The old Free Academy, the first high school, planned to move into East High School, but before its completion in 1903 the city had to project a new West High, opened in 1905, and then a succession of junior highs that have since grown into full fledged free academies. Still the outward pressure persists, and East High is preparing to relocate on a new site on the city's outskirts, as McQuaid High for Catholic boys has done this year. Nazareth College executed a similar move a few years ago, and the new St. John-Fisher College has made its start in a suburban setting. Even the Children's Nursery and Beth El's Religious school have recently occupied modern new quarters far from their former downtown stands.

Long before the schools had finally abandoned the business district, an outward migration of industry commenced too. When the first railroads crossed the river at the brink of the main falls, the milling center there gained favor over its rival at the upper falls. The first shoe and clothing factories sprang up a block or two south of the railroad, close to the mercantile shops of which they were in fact offspring. By the late eighties several of these factories were migrating to more roomy sites where they could get light on all sides, and expand when necessary.

Some of the wood-working and machine-tool shops and foundries, which had originally developed close to the mills, moved out, too, and developed one new industrial center adjacent to the New York Central on the eastern edge of the city in the 1890's and a second just beyond the limits on the west side. That latter center, known as Lincoln Park, and Kodak Park, opened beyond the northern limits by Eastman a few years before, both enjoyed the convenience of two railroad lines, and both were annexed by the expanding city in 1918, when their need for its water, sewer and other services overbalanced the tax differential. Bausch and Lomb had made a still earlier move to a park-like setting overlooking the Genesee gorge in 1875, and at least a half dozen other companies built outlying factories which boasted flower gardens in front before the turn of the century.

Rochester, after all, was the Flower City, the home of the nation's leading nurseries, one of them already sixty years old. The city's appreciation of landscaping took wider hold with the growth of the

park system after 1888. Thus the plans recently announced by several Rochester industries to develop park-like factory campuses in the suburbs are in direct accord with an excellent old tradition. Perhaps, however, warning should be taken from Lincoln and Kodak "parks" where congestion has, within a few decades, so obscured the landscaping that most citizens have forgotten the good intentions.

It is encouraging to see this traditional interest in good landscaping revived, not only in industrial planning, but in new highway planning as well. Certainly Rochester more than any other city, should welcome and insist on an extension of the admirable Thruway landscaping into the very heart of town. The city's decision to give attention to this need on the sector of the Inner Loop that skirts the Civic Center is reassuring. So also is the new interest in the river view from the new War Memorial. Possibly we should revive a plan discussed years ago when an extension of Broad Street to Park Avenue was under consideration. That highway connection will no longer be desirable, with the opening of the Inner Loop, but the plan, advanced by the Broad Street Extension Association, to condemn sufficient land along its route to permit a satisfactory redevelopment, might be adapted to advantage in connection with the Inner Loop. We no longer wish to see traffic arteries lined by shop fronts, but appropriate and attractive uses can be found, such as an oft-proposed down-town television studio, or a modern office building with adjacent parking facilities.

Ample warning concerning the dangers of an unsupervised development of the properties adjoining the Inner or Outer Loops, and their connecting links, can be had by driving out from the center on several of our principal streets. Many of the retail stores, which sprang up along these streets when the trolleys first appeared, have been driven out as the flow of traffic prohibited parking at the curb, here as in the downtown district. A multitude of competing gas stations, automobile show rooms, second-hand car lots (and even a few old car cemeteries which for some reason do not require interment six-feet under) have taken their place. These essential features of the motor age do not all merit or need their present prominence, but until the Civic Development Council, which has considered the problem, or some other group comes up with a practical plan for screening or landscaping them, the proposal that they be excluded from the route of the Thruway connections, sounds good.

In the course of these transformations, several of our principal thoroughfares have sadly lost their original charm. The short stretches on West and East Main that have been blighted by railroad crossing and coal yards since the beginning have, within the last two decades, been extended several blocks further out at the cost of some elegant homes and many more modest structures. A similar blight has raced north on Lake Avenue, toppling such mansions as the "glass house" erected by Lewis Selye in the 1860's and used for years by Nazareth Academy. This last highway has recently begun to achieve a new order almost as sleek, in some sections, as the motor car itself, but little progress is evident along half a dozen other highways.

Rochester's successive plans for the preservation of East Avenue have displayed much greater concern for good landscaping. Most of the great mansions here, like their predecessors in the Third Ward, have outlived their domestic use. Many have already been taken down to save taxes, and others are serving various institutional uses. The stately Willard mansion became the home of the Rochester Historical Society in 1941; the palatial residence of George Eastman became the center of the unique Museum of Photography opened in 1949; the Edmund Lyon homestead became the headquarters of the Academy of Medicine in 1939; and most recently the brownstone Townson house, built from the stone taken out of the old first aqueduct after its demolition in the 1840's, has become the center of a Methodist Home for the Aged. Several clubs and fraternal societies have appropriated old mansions here, too; others serve as parish houses, and three churches have recently acquired new sites on this avenue which has already become the city's favorite promenade for Easter parades. The zoning restraints have been lifted slightly in recent years but only to permit apartment and other uses that conform with the high standards of landscaping the city demands on this fine old avenue.

A similar emphasis on this worthy tradition in the downtown district may some day achieve a pleasing balance between the jutting office buildings, sprawling department stores, mushrooming institutions, overcrowded hotels and the churning sea of automobiles which beats around them. At least the trees chopped off the side streets, when the trolleys and electric wires arrived as the symbols of progress in the nineties, might be replanted now that both these obstacles and most of the retail stores, which once crowded up to their sidewalks, have dis-

appeared. And if industry continues to move out from the center, perhaps the author of a recent Letter to the Editor will have his wish granted, for the great amphitheater at the main falls may again be restored to its natural beauty and become a public park, as was proposed a dozen times before old Falls Field succumbed to industrial invasion more than a half century ago.

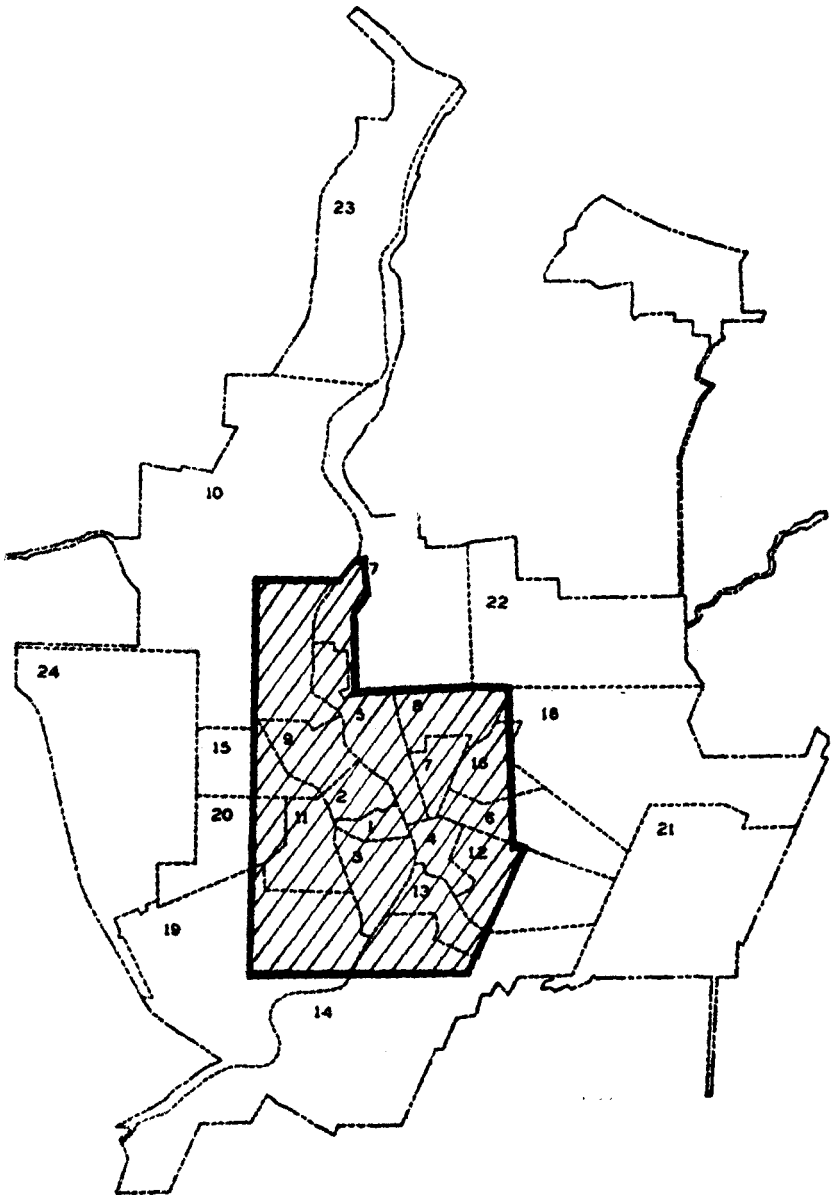
Recently Joseph J. Myler, president of the Chamber of Commerce, has sounded a call for an imaginative redevelopment of the downtown district. "There should be pedestrian malls downtown, devoted to foot traffic only," he declared, adding "tear out several blocks and put fountains and flowers in them and let people walk around downtown. . . . The time has come when downtown merchants must create genuine shopping centers," he concluded, and the reverberations from that speech before the Rochester Hardware Association may yet make it an historic occasion.

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The outward migration of industry, of retail stores and institutions, has been fully matched in new residential construction. Here again we are rebuilding Rochester in new subdivisions on the city's outskirts. The traditional preference for free-standing homes, displayed in previous bursts of expansion, continues strong, though a number of garden apartments have appeared, introducing a relatively new pattern and increasing the density in some outlying districts beyond that of the city as a whole. Yet the backlog of demand for new houses has held up, and while many "for sale" signs speckle the new streets of the 1920's, few of them remain long on the same house, and nearer the center congestion continues unabated

This last situation has become most noticeable in the oldest residential districts where the houses date back to the 1870's or earlier and antedate the construction of the water and sewer systems and the wide introduction of furnaces. Of course the city extended its mains along all of these streets, and most of the houses eventually made one or more connections, but the makeshift installations often added to the depressing effects of age and neglect and recommend these districts only to those unable to buy or rent something better.

Blighted areas, sometimes degenerating into slums, have appeared in most cities, and Rochester has been no exception, as successive Mayor's Committees have discovered. They usually develop on the fringe of



Rochester's Boundaries of 1834 and 1936

the commercial or industrial districts where property owners, anticipating an early transition to a new land use, neglect to make repairs or improvements. In earlier years, when business functions expanded slowly from the center, such blighted areas were converted to new uses after a decade or so, as in the case of the old ramshackle "murders' row" on Buffalo Street, which was cleared to make way for the Rochester Savings Bank in the 1850's, and again a second "murders' row" on Exchange Street, cleared for the Police Headquarters in the 1890's. Unfortunately, the electric trolley and the automobile have changed the pattern of business growth; the first extended it out in shoestring developments that often spread blight in their wake, while the automobile has given rise to new suburban shopping centers which have brought a contraction in the downtown shopping district.

As a result, most of the blighted areas of the twentieth century have waited in vain for a new use. The expansion of the Eastman Kodak Company's State Street factories did finally eliminate many of the wretched hovels that stood in its shadow until World War One, but since many industries, too, are moving to the outskirts, further hope for relief from that source is slight. The path cleared for the Inner Loop is cutting a swath across one of these blighted districts in the southeast sector, and if adequate land is acquired for landscaping, as proposed by the Planning Commission, may eliminate much of it, but generally the loop swings closer to the center and misses the oldest blighted areas that have been waiting for decades for rejuvenation.

The problem goes far beyond the real estate interest, for the families crowded into these districts have usually been those with several strikes against them at the start. Sometimes these families are just too large (by modern standards, that is) since those with three or four young children often have difficulty financing the purchase of a house and discover that it is almost impossible to rent one in a good neighborhood. Some of the families in these districts are recent newcomers to America who have not yet learned to speak and act without a strange accent. Some of course are Negroes and find it difficult even to buy houses in good neighborhoods. Moreover, the combination of personal necessities and outside hostilities that have forced residents into these depressed neighborhoods has enabled the owners of such properties to demand exorbitant rents, (as a recent *Report on Rent Control* by the Temporary State Housing Rent Commission indicates) which their vic-

tims can only pay by excessive doubling up. The result inevitably is a continued deterioration in both social and property values until the neighborhood becomes a slum.

It was just such a situation, which developed over several decades in the Baden-Ormond area north of the railroad tracks in the eighth ward, that prompted the city to undertake one of its most significant rebuilding projects a few years ago. Hanover Houses, built with the aid of state and federal funds and opened in 1952, accommodates 392 families in seven modern 7-story structures on a spacious 7-acre plot. Despite many forebodings, the policy of admitting all qualified families, without discrimination on grounds of race or creed, has proved its merits in practice. Play areas and leisure time programs sponsored by the nearby Baden Street Settlement have helped to develop a wholesome community spirit. Moreover, the contrast these attractive buildings present to the surrounding area has not only prompted nearby merchants to remodel their shops but has induced the city to plan a still wider program of redevelopment which, it is hoped, will check the outward extension of blight for the entire northeast district.

Encouraged by these developments, several citizen groups have urged broad community action to reclaim similar neighborhoods in other parts of town. Fortunately the number of Rochester's blighted areas is small, and few have reached the desperate state of the Baden-Ormond district. Less drastic action, such as the "paint and refresh orders" advocated by the newly created Housing Authority and Rehabilitation Commission, may prove sufficient to check the intrusion of blight on streets where a few dilapidated houses and negligent owners present the chief difficulty. But where the major causes of decay run deeper and involve congestion due to poverty or discrimination, the quick repair of old and inadequate structures may only prolong the misery. "In any event," the Hiscock committee warned, after viewing these problems in their relation to city-wide health needs, "the local health department needs to be equipped for a program directed towards the elimination or improvement of substandard housing."

All the areas of greatest danger lie within the boundaries laid down by Rochester's first city charter in 1834. Not many of the buildings are that old, of course, for most of those still used as dwellings are second generation structures, according to the Real Property Inventory of 1939, but the great majority are of frame construction and have long

since outlived their proper life span. Individual owners are naturally reluctant to rebuild in the midst of such decay, and the Better Housing Association recently warned that, unless comprehensive plans for the rejuvenation of these neighborhoods can be devised, we will see the blight already apparent on several streets in the 3rd and 11th wards spreading south and west, while that in the 4th and parts of the 12th wards moves south and east, and so on around the map.

Fortunately the rebuilding of these neighborhoods, in a most vital sense, has already commenced. Local church groups and other societies, social settlements and neighborhood councils have begun in several of these areas to alert adult residents to the need for united action. This development recalls the social center movement which sprang up in Rochester forty-five years ago and nurtured a true neighborhood spirit in several school districts where the mixture of recent immigrant groups presented a critical problem of social integration. The recent rebirth of community consciousness has expressed itself in various ways, most of them quite practical—campaigns for rat control, better garbage collection, more adequate schools and playgrounds. The city has responded in the first two instances, with encouraging results. Perhaps, as a Councilman from one of these districts declared, the new school needed here, the playground officially recommended there and maybe one or more limited-dividend garden-apartment projects, such as Norton Village, to replace some of the worst housing—all programs repeatedly urged on the city—will stimulate local investment to reclaim these areas.

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Indeed Rochester can find a remedy for almost any of its growth problems within its own historic traditions. From its early discovery of the rejuvenating influences of parks and playgrounds to its more recent experience with such projects as Fernwood and Hanover Houses, the value of community action appears again and again. Perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of this principle is offered by the Mt. Reed industrial site development currently undertaken by the city. There a wasteland unsuitable for intensive residential use, because of the shallow depth of the soil, is being cleared of some 100 misplaced dwellings and prepared for industrial use. This bold experiment on the city's outer fringe demonstrates that where private land and home owners cannot correct an unfortunate situation, the city can and will step in.

Community-wide support has in fact been responsible for most of the spectacular building projects that ring Rochester today. Among the most striking new structures are the new central schools in Penfield, Pittsford, Henrietta and other towns, as well as the McQuaid High School mentioned previously, and East High still on the planning boards. The new buildings at the River Campus and the new Northeast Hospital are the products of city-wide campaigns; so also the improvements at other hospitals which have shared in a carefully planned program of expansion. The county has recently provided us with an attractive modern airport, and the state is building a multi-storied hospital for the mentally ill—an example of long range welfare planning.

Whatever our architectural tastes, we cannot escape a feeling of admiration for the landscaping that surrounds most of these modern projects. The bold new industrial campuses under construction or promised on practically every segment of the city's periphery bring similar thrills, and most of the new shopping centers pride themselves on the attention they have given to plot layout and design. Zoning regulations have been taken up with enthusiasm by most of the surrounding towns, and while some of the new subdivisions may be veering dangerously toward the course explored by the Manhattan tract nearly a hundred years ago, and while many of them display synthetic aspects, at least the speed with which the contractors have put up whole communities, instead of scattered houses as in the past, has given the city's outskirts a more finished appearance than ever before. Moreover, the eager work of these new home owners with rake and spade is already beginning to make up for the reckless destruction of earlier vegetation.

Thus we are developing new cooperative techniques as we proceed with the task of rebuilding and extending the Rochester of the mid-twentieth century. The planning concept, now more widely applied than ever in the past, has absorbed something at least from Rochester's earlier fondness for landscaping. If we can cling to that other early tradition, best exemplified in the old Third Ward, and provide the playgrounds and community centers essential to wholesome neighborhoods, both in our new suburban tracts and in rejuvenated older districts, we may yet approach the goal George Eastman set for us years ago when he proposed that we strive to make Rochester the best city in the world in which to live and bring up a family.