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The Social and Domestic Scene in Rochester, 1840-1860

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By the mid 1840's many Rochesterians had acquired sufficient stability and self-confidence to desire some of the comforts and elegancies of older communities to the east. A few prosperous millers and other business men had erected pretentious mansions a decade before. Several of their neighbors planned similar structures; some even hoped to out-shine by introducing new architectural styles. The new fashions in dresses as well as houses, like the new patterns of behavior among both children and adults, reflected the influence of eastern cities. National magazines, such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* began to appear on parlor tables, rivaling if not displacing the *Genesee Farmer* in household favor. Only the well-to-do could afford all the fine clothes and elegant domestic trifles described there, but many who perhaps never read these journals could not escape the tantalizing sight of their more fortunate neighbors driving off for a social call in a smoothly lacquered carriage. Nor could the average citizen avoid a longing glance at some of the attractive displays by local tradesmen, a few of whom had recently installed plate glass windows in front of their stores. And if the local papers (as well as those elsewhere) still lacked the techniques for pictorial illustration, their wordy advertisements made up the deficiency.

Fashions 1840-1860

An Era of Crinolines, Hoops, and Tight Lacings

"On first rising the correct dress for a gentleman is a cap of cotton

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or muslin, or silk, a morning gown or a vest with sleeves. For a lady, a small muslin cap, a camisole or common robe is correct. It is well that a half corset should precede the full corset for it is bad taste for a lady not to be laced at all.”¹ Such clothing was necessary for warmth on winter mornings in the cold drafty homes of last century.

A man of fashion in the 1840's dressed for the street in a roll-collared short-waisted coat with short, broad tails and plain, moderately full trousers, cut narrow for the full length of the leg. These trousers of subdued patterns of dark shades, plaids or checks, were looped under the instep and, when properly pressed, boasted no creases. His shirt was starched, pleated, frilled, tucked or shirred, with fancy buttons or studs decorating it. A snug low-waisted vest of a checked or plaid material fitted over the shirt. His rather high collar either turned out in front under the chin or turned down all around. His white cravat, draped about his collar, met in intricate knots in front. Later in the decade, he probably wore a black satin or taffeta tie folded loosely about his collar and puffed under the chin. He wore a high-collared, fairly full-shirted topcoat to complete his outfit. These topcoats, often shorter than waist-coats, revealed the tails of the latter. His stylish hat of gray or black beaver stood tall and perpendicular with a moderately full brim. His rather narrow shoes featured pointed toes. Unfortunately, for the gentleman without curly hair, the fashion was to part the hair on the side, brush it in a wave over the forehead, curl it over the ears, and wear it long and curly over the nape of the neck. Perhaps this man wore a pointed medium-sized closely trimmed beard and grew side whiskers later in the decade when they became fashionable. A cane, snuff box, gaiters, gloves and eyeglasses completed his accessories.

During the 1850's gentlemen's trousers became a little narrower. Although dress trousers still looped under the shoe, in everyday trousers this feature was discarded. Men wore light shades for dress and darker shades for everyday. Waistlines in coats dropped and the skirt of a coat fitted trimly about the wearer's hips with the edges meeting in front and curving outward toward the bottom. A single-breasted short sack coat came into fashion at this time. Shoes of this decade featured blunt tips, moderate heels and lacing or elastic insets.

For dress, fashionable gentlemen in this era wore circular capes usually with a brilliantly colored satin lining. Formal garb also included white ties, low slippers with bows and striped socks.

It is interesting to note that Rochester's Old Third Ward received its nickname, "The Ruffled Shirt Ward," from its residents who wore such shirts in this era. Dr. Levi Ward with his knee breeches, long black stockings and the only queue in Rochester was an outstanding exception to the standard dress of the period.

Unfortunately, children had to wear clothes cut on the lines of their elders. Young boys wore long trousers full about the waist and gathered into a fitted band. Shirts, cut full with tucks and ruffles, followed the general lines of women's blouses rather than men's shirts. Over these shirts, boys wore short jackets of dark velvet or cashmere. A square linen collar turned down, a ribbon necktie and a cap of dark cloth completed the outfit. Small girls wore their hair brushed straight back and kept in place by springs of steel covered with velvet. Petite coal scuttle bonnets covered their hair. Very full little dresses, fashioned after their mother's costumes, though plainer, and pantalettes of cambric muslin completed their outfits.

Clothing for women during this era continued to imply that they were fragile, sheltered beings who swooned at slight provocation. Dresses featured heavy full shirts of about 10 yards in circumference which reached to the floor and gave the wearers the appearance of gracefully proportioned bells. Crinoline skirts and later hoops were worn beneath and supported the full skirts. Although these two fashions became the butt of much ridicule, they were lighter, more hygenic and allowed more freedom than the numerous petticoats formerly worn.

Susan B. Anthony, for an example, described her new clothes with a great deal of evident pride in a letter written in 1846. She spoke of her shoes with patent leather heels and toes, blue prunella half-gaiters, new gown of white, blue, purple and brown plaid which had two puffs around the skirt, cuffs to the sleeves, with puffs and buttons where they ended and puffs at the wrists.²

During the 1850's the same general fashions as those worn in the previous decade prevailed. The most notable change in women's fashion came with the end of the crinoline skirt and th introduction of the hoop skirt about 1855. An article appeared in the *Rochester Daily Democrat* in July 1856 describing this pretentious innovation. These wire or whalebone hoops required only one petticoat over them. The dress of 1850 featured a basque of either velvet or some dark cloth best defined as a bodice with a short skirt or tails below the waistline. Women wore silk skirts of a contrasting design with these basques.

India muslins, embroidered in colors were still worn. Flounces in skirts became more popular and more numerous than ever. During this decade trimmings matched the dresses. Sleeves were either plain or slightly full. The open bell or pagoda sleeve with white undersleeve as well as dropped shoulders came into vogue during the fifties. By the last two years of the decade panelled skirts made of two contrasting materials replaced the ruffled skirts, and low necks and berthas were worn almost universally with either open sleeves and lace undersleeves or a very short sleeve.

Cashmere shawls continued in fashion as did poke bonnets although they perched further back on the head, became smaller in size and were edged with rows of lace. These bonnets, tied under the chin with long ribbon streamers, usually had long flowing veils draped over their hoods. Other popular headdresses included lace caps for matrons and leghorn hats for younger women. Hair-styles remained somewhat the same as in the forties with the addition of long shoulder curls adopted by some women. By 1858-59, however, it was fashionable for women to arrange their hair in heavy braids coiled around their heads, coronet style. Ornaments for such a coiffure included tiaras of velvet, pearls, coral or jet.

The standard underwear for women, or lingerie as it was dubbed by *Godey's Lady's Book* in the early 1850's, consisted of a chemise, a corset, long drawers or pantalettes, a short flannel or knit petticoat for winter wear and petticoats or crinolines.

A stylish bathing suit which was probably used by the few modern Rochester women bathing in Lake Ontario had long bell-shaped sleeves, a skirt of two layers of ruffles, pantalettes to the ankles and a straw hat tied under the chin. Bathing shoes and stockings completed the outfit. No wonder bathers at Charlotte were so few considering the bulky garments worn then.

Women's dresses were made by the women themselves or by hired dressmakers or seamstresses. The most desirable fabrics seemed to be satin, watered silk, plaid taffeta, and crepe. Foulards (a thin soft material of either silk or silk and cotton), organdy and muslin enjoyed wide use in warm weather. These materials could be purchased at a number of stores in the city, and in January 1858 an agent for the newly released home sewing machines reached Rochester. It was possible to buy ready-made clothing at several stores, although the most fashionable people probably had their apparel custom made by local

experts. One could buy endless accessories in some of the local stores. For instance, Shelton's and Company, 23 State Street, advertised in the *City Directory* of 1844 a stock of "Ready Made clothing, cloths, cassimers, and vestings—a large assortment of collars, bosoms and every description of . . . linen handkerchiefs, suspenders, hose, half hose, flannel and knit drawers and wrappers of all kinds." An appendage to this list stated that garments would be made to order "in the neatest manner and on the shortest notice."³ Other stores advertised hats, caps, furs, mantillas, lace, ribbon, millinery, gloves, hair dye, and wigs. Another establishment, J. C. Booth and Company, 27 Courtland Street, boasted in 1850 of having many London and Paris imports of the latest styles. This firm also sold ready-made clothing suitable for the California trade.⁴ One enterprise, that of E. Ocumpaugh, 71 Main Street, combined his retail business with a laundry where "gent's collars [were] done up with the same finish as when new, 25c a doz."⁵

Of course, many items of clothing and accessories in general demand were made here in Rochester. The Flower City became quite famous for some of these products. Eyeglasses or spectacles as they were known furnish one example. The story of J. J. Bausch who opened a little shop in the Reynolds Arcade in the 1850's and ground lenses by hand is well known to most Rochesterians today. The wire-frame spectacles with their tiny oval or octagonal lenses of pebble or crown glass were a popular accessory of the day. Shoes, another product for which Rochester gained fame, were manufactured by two outstanding firms of this era, J. W. Hatch Shoe Company and Sage & Pancoast Shoe Company. Although its manufacture never brought any great notice to the city, perfume was produced by the Rochester Chemical Works which advertised French Extracts and Golden Perfumeries in the *City Directory* of 1859.

During the 1850's several articles and letters appeared in the Rochester papers commenting on feminine fashion. The appearance of the contemporary matron prompted one writer in the *Daily Union* in December 1855 to declare that "we might be inclined to admire her figure for a hogshead, but certainly it is doing too great a violence to true taste to think it beautiful for a woman."⁶ A letter, whose author, surprisingly enough, was a woman, appeared in the *Union & Advertiser* in June 1857 ridiculing hoops and claiming that men looked like pigmies next to women who wore this fashion. She further complained that gentlemen at parties, so tightly compressed between hoops, were in

danger of suffocating. In conclusion, her letter claimed that only four such fashionably dressed ladies could sit in a church pew intended for seven. Thus men let their women go to church while they stayed home. Therefore, she declared, it was not only the body which suffered but also the soul! In August 1858, another article appeared in the *Union & Advertiser* describing the results of a poll taken of 200 men's opinions on women's dress. With the 200 men in all classes—day laborers, mechanics, machinists, speculators, preachers, doctors, lawyers and loafers—the general conclusion was "that a moderately expanded skirt is graceful, convenient and becoming and particularly so when so shortened that it does not sweep the crossings." "How ridiculous," the author continued, "does it appear to any man of sense to see a lady drawing in the hem of a blue satin skirt a pound or two or filth." ⁷

One realistic protest to the current fashions was introduced in 1851 by Elizabeth Smith Miller who came to Seneca Falls, New York to visit her cousin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, dressed in a strange new garb of her own design. Mrs. Stanton was so fond of that new outfit, which Mrs. Miller had derived from costumes worn by women patients in sanitariums, that she adopted it herself. Amelia Bloomer also of Seneca Falls, who was editor of a semi-monthly temperance journal called the *Lily*, immediately saw the advantages of the new outfit, made one herself, and began advocating it in her magazine. Thus, due to the publicity which she gave it and the public's fancy to the name, the strange garb was called the Bloomer Dress. Mrs. Bloomer who was an advocate of women's suffrage thought this dress would serve to demonstrate that women were ready to assume some of men's prerogatives.

A typical Bloomer walking dress consisted of full Turkish pantalletes of Mazarine blue silk, a ruffled short full skirt of the same material, a Marseilles vest open half way to the waist over a plaited linen bosom, and an overdress of embroidered silk, high at the back but open all the way in front so as to show the vest, and loose sleeves with full white undersleeves. A hat of gray beaver with a rich plume completed the outfit. This Bloomer walking dress and a more elaborate Bloomer evening dress were described in *Peterson's Magazine* in 1851.

Unfortunately, this new style resulted chiefly in joking and ridicule directed at its wearers.⁸ The vogue spread and was seen everywhere but small boys and loafers tortured the wearers, and newspapers throughout the country took up the campaign against it. Rochester's Susan B. Anthony wore the garb for a short time in the early 1850's

but both she and Mrs. Stanton soon abandoned it, although Mrs. Bloomer and its originator, Mrs. Miller, continued to wear it for years.

Those in favor of dress reform for women did not, however, give up easily. In the *Union & Advertiser* of January 1858 an article reported on a State Dress Reform convention which met at Canastota. Its author apparently took a dim view of the proceedings sponsored by the famous Gerrit Smith, father of the Bloomer dress designer. The convention, attended by both men and women who strongly opposed long petticoats and low-necked dresses, evidently accomplished very little at this time or at other meetings later in the decade. This movement, however, did prove to be a straw in the wind.

Homes of the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Most of the century-old homes still standing in Rochester today are stately mansions which represent the wealthier class of the period. But for the 300 large pretentious houses there were 6,000 smaller homes and modest cottages.⁹

The Greek or Classic Revival style of architecture had reached Rochester during the previous decade. One fine example is the Whitteley House at Troup and Fitzhugh Streets built in 1835. Another is the Jonathan Child home on Washington Street built in 1838. Woodside, the present home of the Historical Society, at 485 East Avenue, is an interesting variant of the same type. The Amos Bronson home at Plymouth and Atkinson Street built in 1848 and the George Eastman birthplace now located behind the Eastman House at 900 East Avenue represent this style in the more modest cottage type dwelling.

Soon after the Greek Revival came the Gothic Revival and Queen Anne styles. Built in 1849, the old Burke house which now belongs to the Rochester Institute of Technology on Spring and Washington Streets exemplifies Gothic architecture. The eleven-room Elmwood cottage of Captain Robert Harding at Genesee Street and Elmdorf Avenue also represents the Gothic style which is known for its many and very pointed gables and attached wooden "gingerbread." The plans for many Gothic cottages can be seen in the copies of the *Genesee Farmer* of the 1850's. The Cogswell house on East Avenue which was a good example of the Queen Anne style with its wide overhanging eaves and the square cupolas has, unfortunately, been demolished. The Medbury-Wild house at Spring Street and Livingston Park, although of a little later date, is also Queen Anne.

Most of the houses were painted white; the only contrast came from the red brick and green shutters. Inside as well as outside shutters served as a protection from the winds and other elements. This feature can still be seen in the library of the Woodside house.

Some houses had cesspools which collected and retained refuse material. The more fortunate citizens obtained water from pumps in their yards. Some wells, however, served as many as a dozen families and were subject to much pollution.

A few homes in the area had the new furnaces which provided central heating, generally hot air, though steam radiators were advertised at the close of the period. Most residents, though, relied on either fireplaces or stoves, sometimes both. One can see the fireplaces in nearly every room in both the Whittlesey and Woodside houses. In the homes where stoves still served, they were installed here and there throughout the house causing some rooms to be warm while others were cold.

The most pretentious mansions boasted a parlor or double parlor, a library, a drawing room, a dining room, a kitchen, pantry, and several bedrooms. Homeowners of more modest means could not, of course, afford such a variety of rooms. Most homes, however, had at least a parlor, a living or dining room and a kitchen on the first floor and some second floor bedrooms.

The hallway of the house provided the visitor's first impression. Here he would see a tall elaborate hatrack, a small wooden table, a doormat and often a tall wooden grandfather's clock. A second entrance about seven feet from the front door made of curtains with lead pieces in the bottom of them provided color in this area and prevented drafts from entering the inner part of the house. Oilcloth, painted canvas, or the newly-improved linoleum covered this floor area.

The parlor of the house, used only for special occasions such as weddings and funerals, received the best furnishings and the most attention of the homemaker. A large marble-topped table dominated this room. On it would be a whale oil lamp and the family Bible containing all pertinent births, marriages and deaths. Other parlor furniture usually included a settee or sofa, a magnificent whatnot, and frequently a piano. A man's chair, a woman's chair and four upholstered side chairs were necessary parts of the parlor suite, too. Rosewood in the John H. Belter style with its ornate carving, scrolling or gilding, proved to be the most expensive and fashionable kind available. Other

less expensive suites could be had in walnut, oak, chestnut or dyed maple.

The accessories in such a room seemed of utmost importance especially to the wealthier people. Elaborate draperies and rugs were the index to one's financial position. A flowered Brussels or Wilton rug, such as are in the Whittlesey House parlors, excited the greatest envy. In the smaller homes, straw matting, such as can be seen in the Eastman birthplace, served as carpeting. Mural or landscape wallpaper was popular then. Other wall decorations included steel engravings, daguerrotypes, family portraits, and religious mottoes and patterns worked in needlepoint. As many draperies as the household could afford decorated the windows in the parlor. Worsted damask draperies and glass curtains adorned the most elegant homes. Chintz, printed cotton and muslin served as curtain materials in the simpler cottages. Other parlor decorations included black or white mantelpieces, mirrors and lamps. A clock often adorned these mantelpieces. Other fashionable mantel ornaments included shell bouquets, vases and statuettes. The statuettes were made in groups, pairs, and sets to represent the trades, the fates, and the elements. These plaster creations also decked the whatnot, the cabinet and the parlor table. Fire irons and a small set of iron fire tools completed the fireplace fixtures.

Besides whale oil, lard oil and camphene served as lamp fuels. Although gas lighting came to Rochester in December 1848, several years passed before this new innovation was widely adopted in city homes.

The dining room or living room of the average home played an important part in the mid-nineteenth century scheme of living. A large wooden table, a sideboard, several chairs, and occasionally a sofa occupied this room. There families spent many evenings.

A suite of a large elaborate bookcase, a desk or secretary, a table and straight chairs furnished the library. This room had a cool formal appearance. Drawing room furnishings consisted of a large square carpet in the center of the floor, a fireplace with a gilt-edge mirror or a portrait of a departed family member above it. A number of portraits of Rochester's notables painted by Grove S. Gilbert are now owned by the Rochester Historical Society. Some of them decorate the walls at Woodside today.

Another room of great importance in every home was, of course, the kitchen. In fact, some homes even had a second one, called the

back kitchen, for heavy work. A range set into the opening of the kitchen fireplace served, in many cases, as the cooking stove. In other instances, a wood burning stove answered the need; gas stoves were as yet undreamed of. A strong, stout-legged table, often occupied the center of the floor. Smaller tables at the sides of the room were sometimes only flaps that hung against the wall when not in use. The kitchen dresser, like a tall cupboard, had open shelves above to hold plates and cups. Little strips of wood on the front of these shelves prevented the dishes from sliding. The closed shelves held crockery, wooden tubs and other kitchen equipment. Plain, sturdy chairs and stools, often stained rather than painted, were other essential pieces of kitchen furniture. A clock generally served as another important kitchen fixture. A churn for butter making stood either here or in the pantry. Other equipment located in the pantry included numerous kitchen utensils of either wood or crockery, metal forms for candlemaking, metal foot-warmers, and irons. Many kitchens had stone or metal-lined wooden sinks, pumps, and drain pipes for waste water. Some women were even fortunate enough to have an ice cooler or an ice chest. However, most homemakers kept the few perishables they had in cool cellars or on trays lowered into wells. Much of the food of the day required no refrigeration as it was salted, dried, smoked or canned.

The cellar usually had its own outdoor entrance and cool earthen floor. It provided storage space for large quantities of both food and fuel.

In addition to the second floor bedrooms, there was, in many houses, one on the ground floor. The big fourposter bed remained as the dominant feature in many bedrooms, especially in the more pretentious homes. A canopy over the top and a variety of curtains and ruffles decorated this massive bedstead. Examples of these can be seen in a bedroom at Woodside and in two bedrooms at the Whittlesey House. Feathers, straw, or hair filled the mattresses for these beds. A cradle or a trundle bed usually proved to be another necessity in at least one of these rooms. The cradle with sides flaring upward and outward, having a framework dovetailed and mortised at the corners, served as the baby's first bed. After the infant was a year old, he was transferred to a trundle bed which, when not in use, slid under the mother's bed. A Boston or Windsor rocker, often painted black and decorated with a gold design, was kept in this room to help the mother rock her babies to sleep. The restored bedroom at Woodside House

shows such nursery furniture. Other essential items included a night stand, a chest of drawers, a massive wardrobe for clothing, a washstand and some straight chairs. Sofas and dressing tables with mirrors had a place in the more elaborate bedrooms.

Some homes had bathrooms over the kitchen equipped with an earth closet, or a water closet supplied from a tank in the attic. However, the outdoor privy still served as the family convenience in many households. In the event of no bathroom, people took their baths in either the bedroom or kitchen with hot water heated by the kitchen stove.

The use of color in home decorating retained favor a century ago. For example, crimson, purple, and gold might be combined in a fashionable parlor of that period. The idea was to have contrast in both color and tone. Color schemes for various rooms seemed to be based on the functions for which each area was intended. Dining rooms in rich warm hues contrasted with libraries and hallways in cold severe tones; witness the black wall in the upstairs hallway of the Whiteley house for example. Light colors decorated bedrooms while parlors and drawing rooms sported the gayest colors in the house—as gay as the owner wished to have them.

Where did Rochesterians buy the necessary equipment to furnish their homes? Fashionable and expensive furniture probably came from the New York workshop of John Belter or from the furniture establishment of Henkels in Philadelphia. Most householders, however, selected theirs here in the city. The *City Directory* of 1841 lists 64 engaged in the various furniture making trades—cabinetmakers, chairmakers, chair bottomers, chair painters, bedstead makers and pianoforte makers.¹⁰ Unfortunately, very little is known about these men or their work. Some who advertised in the newspapers and directories of the time were Brewster & Fenn, 53 & 55 State Street, Jacob Scribers, 17 Front Street, C. J. Hayden of 29 State Street and Frederick Starr of 49 Main Street. It is difficult to designate any pieces to a specific maker because these furniture craftsmen usually didn't sign their work. An elegant rosewood piano made about 1860 by Frederick Starr can, however, be seen in the back parlor of the Woodside House today.

The first exponent of mass production in Rochester was Charles T. Robinson who came here in 1825, set himself up in the chairmaking business in a wooden building on Brown's race and soon operated on a scale large enough to employ fifty men. The beginning of mass pro-

duction by this Rochesterian proved to be only an example of what was happening throughout the rest of the country. The furniture craft gradually turned into an industry. These new factories all ground out the currently popular French Antique style. In fact, the manufacture was, for a time, one of Rochester's most important industries.

One could also buy "rich, beautiful and genteel" furniture (all homemakers strove above all to have their homes look genteel) at auctions such as those held by Edwin Scrantom at his place at 25 Buffalo Street.

Other household equipment could be purchased here in the city, too. The Live Yankee at 101 Main Street offered for sale baskets, bird cages, brushes, door mats, feather dusters and rocking horses. At the City Crockery Store at 11 Buffalo Street one could buy glass ware, table cutlery and Britannia ware. Stoves of various types could be purchased from either James E. Cheney, 59 & 61 State Street, or from French & Whipple at 39 Exchange Street. J. L. Chappell of 177 Buffalo Street advertised all kinds of coal for furnaces, blacksmithing and domestic purposes.¹¹ R. W. Sanborn, dealer in wood and ice, at the Caledonia Bridge on South Sophia Street (now Plymouth Avenue) advertised "wood delivered in quantities to suit purchasers as cheap as the cheapest and as good as the best."¹² In his ad he also claimed that ice would be furnished daily (with the exception of Sundays) from May 20 to October 10.

Social Life and Customs 1840-1860

Religion remained as the dominant influence in both the family and personal lives of Rochesterians in the two decades between 1840 and 1860. Rochester was then, essentially, a Puritan city, and moral standards still reflected such influence. For example, proper gentlemen appeared in their pews at every church service. Even Saturday night which fell under the shadow of Sunday marked a sacred time. On this evening appropriate reading consisted of the Bible, Pilgrim's Progress or some other religious volume. The Sabbath began with a cold breakfast for only a minimum of cooking as well as other essential work should be done on this day. A morning church service was followed by a light lunch of bread and butter and a second church service usually at 2:30 in the afternoon. A late hearty dinner came at the end of the day.

To the children it must have been a day of insufferable boredom. Frederick Whittlesey, recalling it years later as a grandfather, described

Sunday as a day so dull that the children longed for school in comparison. In strict Calvinistic families, even a laugh or a smile on this day seemed sinful. The horses must not be harnessed and even the Sunday walk for recreation was not quite respectable. Activities throughout the week, as well as on Sunday, pivoted about the church.

In home life, father was dominant. His decisions became final to his wife as well as to his children. Women's place in that day was, of course, in the home. Her life revolved about the daily chores of child care, washing, ironing, mending, baking and other household duties. No purely social organizations existed as yet. Religious or philanthropic groups such as the Female Charitable Society provided appropriate activities for the ladies. Occasionally the women went to tea parties, quilting and sewing bees and caudle parties where the young mothers formally exhibited their new babies to their friends. Of course many churches had sewing societies which made articles to sell at church bazaars. In addition to these bazaars, church socials, singing societies and informal square dances (though many church members frowned on them) served to bring the men and women of the community together.

The men entertained themselves with practice nights of the band, meetings and drills of both military and fire companies, and public dinners at the Mansion House, the Eagle Hotel or the Rochester House. Such feasts they had, too! A typical dinner like the one served at the Pioneer Festival at the Blossom Hotel in September 1847 included:

	<i>Fish</i>	
	Salmon	
	<i>Boiled</i>	
Chickens		Mutton
Hams		Corned Beef, Cabbage
Tongue		Pork
	<i>Side Dishes</i>	
Oyster pies		Oysters fried
Chicken pies		Curry and rice
Small birds		Lamb
Wine sauce		Mint Sauce
	<i>Roast</i>	
Beef		Pork
Veal		Chicken
Turkey		Mutton

	<i>Game</i>	
Prairie Chickens		Quail
Partridge		Wild Duck
Woodcock		Snipe
Plover		Pigeon
	<i>Vegetables</i>	
Carolina Potatoes, Boiled		
Baked Potatoes		Beans
Turnips		Squash
Beets		Mashed Potatoes
Onions		Celery
	<i>Pastry</i>	
Rice pudding		Fruit pudding
Peace pie		Mince pie
Apple pie		Pumpkin pie
	<i>Dessert</i>	
Melons		Grapes
Apples		Almonds
Peaches		Raisins
Pears		

How the participants survived such a meal is a source of constant amazement!

Other activities for men included literary clubs which began to organize in the 1850's. One well known one, the Pundit Club, was founded in 1854. It was not until 1860 that the first social organization, the Rocheser Club, appeared. The men could bring out their cigars at such occasions but smoking in the presence of ladies was taboo and it was not until 1860 that news reached Rochester of the invention of paper-wrapped cigarettes in Paris

The weekday began with a hearty breakfast of oatmeal or corn meal mush, meat in "lighter" forms (beefsteak, mutton chops, veal cutlet or sausages), eggs, usually boiled, bread (hot bread or muffins), coffee or tea, and occasionally griddle cakes. Dinner came in the middle of the day except among the most formal wealthy people. Most men lived near enough to their work to come home for this meal. Soup, meat (plenty of it and with gravy), fish on Friday, jellies and jams and dessert were essential features of his noonday meal. In the absence of a menu, it is logical to assume that supper consisted of about

the same foods only on a smaller scale. In the evening family members read or sewed and retired early.

Men enjoyed several opportunities for daily contacts with their friends. Each day they gathered at the Reynolds Arcade for an important event, the mail delivery. It therefore became the exchange or place to transact business as well as a spot for friendly social gatherings. Another favorite meeting place seemed to be the counting room of the *Daily Democrat*.¹³ It was, in fact, a place of exchange for all Western New York. Here the men gathered to discuss the prospects of the wheat crop, or the coming elections, the laying of the Atlantic cable, or the difference between the old and new school Presbyterians.

Favorite activities of the young people included picnics, drives to Mt. Hope Cemetery, excursions to the lake, sleigh rides and song fests. Young ladies alone enjoyed sewing societies in the churches. As the years went by some parents allowed their young folks to go to dancing parties, too. In the rural area around the city, corn huskings and candy pulls proved to be the most popular entertainments. Croquet did not come in until 1863.

School, although not compulsory, was the order of the day for children. Those of Third Ward families received their education almost exclusively in private schools and seminaries. Some of these private organizations actually served as finishing schools where pupils learned good manners as well as their three R's. A public school system, organized in 1841, had, by 1844, fifteen district schools. In these schools there were 4,246 pupils and 45 teachers, an average of 99 students to each teacher¹⁴ though perhaps a poor attendance made the ratio less startling in practice. Children studied somewhat the same subjects as they do today, although the textbooks and material presentation apparently differed greatly. It is interesting to note in passing that vocal music received popular consideration in the public schools of this period. The Board of Education provided a list of textbooks but instead of a book rental service, parents had to buy their children's books. According to some reports, several teachers of that day treated misbehaving pupils very harshly. These instructors often hit their defenseless victims and little was done to correct the situation. Some teachers, on the other hand, commanded great respect and affection. Miss Araminta D. Doolittle of the Rochester Female Academy was one, and another popular and well-loved favorite was Dr. Chester Dewey of the old Rochester High School. This old school which stood

on the present site of the Unitarian Church loomed three stories high with one large schoolroom and two recitation rooms on each floor. Theoretically, stoves warmed the rooms, but in the winter it was too warm near the stove and too cold very far away from it. Many school children probably had numb limbs before some winter days finished. The opening exercises each day began with prayers and a short address by one of the teachers on some topic of passing interest. The hours of attendance were from nine to twelve A. M. and one to four P. M. with no school on Saturday afternoon.

Boys and girls had their duties to perform at home, too. Although in the wealthiest homes it was considered ungentle for the women and girls to do housework, many girls in other households probably had to help their mothers with the home chores. The boys had their duties too. In fact, it was deemed disgraceful in most families if a boy didn't have some chore to perform. There was marketing to be done, wood to be split or sawed, streets to be swept and snow to be removed in winter. Nearly every youngster had these or other duties to perform.

In spite of their many duties children did have fun in that day. Swimming became a favorite sport for boys in the summer. The spot for this recreation was on either side of the river not far above the dam. The boys dwelling on either side showed extreme jealousy when those from the other side infringed upon their premises. In the winter coasting provided a great source of fun for young fellows. The steep Andrews Street hill on the eastern side of the river was a favorite spot for his activity. Here the youngsters in sliding down hill, finished their run upon the ice of the river. In so doing they often came dangerously close to the edge of the ice but probably the sport seemed more adventuresome this way.

Little girls stayed around home for the most part. They learned to sew small samplers and probably played with their dolls and other toys.

The years between 1840 and 1850 marked a broadening of interests in both amusements and cultural pursuits. Still, only the emancipated attended such public entertainments as theatrical exhibitions, dances, panoramas, dioramas and amusement gardens. Such recreation went against many religious convictions and moral codes. It is interesting to note that up to 1849 the *Rochester Daily Advertiser* prohibited its editorial staff from even mentioning the circus or the theater. Even in the 1850's when comments and criticisms began to appear, they

were printed two or three days after the event when a few lines of vacant space could be found.

However, Rochester felt that it offered quite a variety in the way of entertainment. The foreword of the 1844 *City Directory* proudly claimed: "Nor is Rochester destitute of places of resort and amusement."

"Romance can gratify itself along the majestic banks of our beautiful Genesee, and in visiting our several cataracts. The reflecting mind can meditate profitably among the tombs, the flower-enamelled paths and woodland dells of our beautiful Mt. Hope. The enquiring mind can dwell upon the lore of ages, collected upon the shelves and tables of our public reading rooms and libraries; and the curious can visit the 100,000 curiosities collected from the sea, earth and sky of the four quarters of the globe in our Museum."

"In our public gardens, too, all can pass an hour or two in luxurious idleness. And every week or two an opportunity is offered of witnessing the miraculous performance of some magician or harlequin, or of listening to some songster whose warblings, if the newspapers say truly, have made half the world beside themselves with wonder and amazement. Concerts, lectures and soirees abound at all seasons of the year so that all tastes and dispositions can, if they will, be gratified." ¹⁶

It is true that many who still frowned on the theater gradually became constant patrons of many dioramas, and "astronomical, comical and moral exhibitions" such as that brought to the Morton House by Mr. Goss in 1844. The middle of the 1840's marked the beginning of Negro minstrelsy too. Christy's Minstrels gave their first performance here at the Eagle Hotel on September 17, 1845. About the same time, the lecture era came into its own. Temperance lectures, for example, began to attract much attention. Prior to this movement liquor and tobacco enjoyed almost universal use. Other lectures included those at the Athenaeum founded in an earlier decade, which served throughout this period, providing intellectual edification and entertainment drawing large crowds. These lecturers, leaders of the hour in their own fields, included such noted men as Charles Dickens, Horace Greeley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Frederick Douglass, James Russell Lowell, and Daniel Webster. Concerts became another popular form of entertainment. Some of them took place at the Eagle Hotel, Minerva Hall and after 1849, in the new Corinthian Hall. The voices of Parepa-Rosa, Campanari, Nielsen and especially Jenny Lind

proved to be favorites here. The famous Norwegian, Ole Bull, and Henri Appy, who later made his home here, were two great violinists who were well received in this city.

Although such entertainments were not sanctioned by all citizens, the traveling circus and stock companies began stopping at Rochester in the late 1840's and apparently attracted increasingly good audiences. P. T. Barnum's circus came here for the first time in 1848.

In a sense the famous "Rochester Knockings" or "Rappings" of the Fox Sisters formed part of the social picture in these decades. The first public exposition of these spirit rappings came on November 14, 1849. Some believers, impressed by these rappings, joined to establish a new religion called Spiritualism. During this time many pamphlets appeared whose authors, many of whom were well-known and trusted citizens, claimed that they had heard messages spelled out, and heeded ghostly warnings.

Holidays provided social highlights in the year as well as days of happy anticipation especially for children. Receptions and informal visits were traditional on New Year's Day. Eastsiders had their open houses in the morning and the Third Warders held forth in the afternoon. Men, dressed in their best garbs, rented hacks or drove their cutters to their many friends' homes where they were greeted by charming ladies and delicious food. Mrs. J. Milton French of the Third Ward was particularly noted for her pleasant hospitality on these occasions. It was her custom to invite five or six young lady friends to assist in receiving the young men callers. Even though she didn't serve punch, her callers apparently found her lunches of scalloped oysters, rolls, cakes, and coffee very acceptable.

Easter, of course, was celebrated by religious services. The next important holiday and one which always proved to be great fun for the children came on the Fourth of July. Independence Day in Rochester in 1845 was probably as typical as any in that period. On that day a great demonstration took place in Rochester's City Garden. "There were also fire balloons and fire pieces. The Star of Independence—The Battle of Bunker Hill—bursting in the night skies and the band playing everything, from 'The Cot Where I Was Born' and of course, the ever popular tune 'Yankee Doodle,' to the latest hit, 'The Grave of Napoleon.' " ¹⁷ Public dinners at such places as the Rochester House and the Eagle Hotel on the Fourth turned into occasions for lengthy ten-course dinners washed down with countless toasts.

People in the rural areas around the city made quite a day of it, too. Children had firecrackers and popcorn for the occasion. Other features included a parade and the "speakin" followed by refreshments and dancing on the green. A glorious showing of fireworks after night-fall completed the celebration.

Some churches held festivities for children at Halloween. However, it appears that children in the counry made more of this occasion. They enjoyed jack o'lanterns, nighttime pranks, bobbing for apples, and games.

Thanksgiving, the next festive holiday, served as an occasion for homecoming. Since it was not a national holiday at the time, it was celebrated on a day set by the governor. One Rochesterian, for example, recalled observing it on December 9th in 1841. Inevitably, this event called forth the best culinary skills of the womenfolk. In addition to the traditional turkey and pumpkin pie there was always an endless variety of other foods. Some of those suggested by Sarah Josepha Hale in her *Godsey's Lady's Book* included oysters etiquette, Lafayette ducks with snow balls, ham soaked in cider for three weeks, stuffed with sweet potatoes and baked in maple syrup, Indian pudding and frummety sauce. Imagine all these foods at the same meal! The celebration of this day, of course, called for the best dishes and linens and an open parlor.

Christmas brought the attendance of church services, the exchange of gifts among friends and family, and donations to the needy. Although the first Christmas tree didn't appear in Rochester until 1840, George W. Fisher's Book Store advertised trees and things to put on them by December 1856. Strangely enough, ads for Christmas gifts didn't appear in the newspapers until the week before the holiday and these were only small ones which continued for days afterward without change. Little attention was devoted to this holiday in other parts of the papers, too. In addition, many business places stayed open on this day.

Besides the regular holidays on the calendar, certain local events afforded much excitement. The event of the year in 1858, for example, was the Bal Masque in February at the former home of Jonathan Child at Broad and Washington Streets. During the late 1850's other dances such as the Young Bachelor's Ball at Wood's Academy in February 1857 and 1858 achieved increasing popularity.

Weddings also seemed to be occasions for great festivity. Three hundred people received invitations to the wedding in 1843 of Juliana Haight and George Hart at the home of the bride's parents. The first fashionable church wedding in the Third Ward was also the scene of great excitement. On this occasion in 1856 the daughter of Aaron Erickson married Gilman H. Perkins at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. A reception at the Erickson home followed the ceremony. Two thirds of the entire police force (then numbering three men) were called out to hold back the crowd at the church. The spectators followed the carriage of the bridal couple back to the Erickson home and even climbed up on the window sills of the parlor and dining room to get a good view of the elegant costumes and beautiful decorations. Mr. Erickson, who was reputedly endowed with an abundance of good humor and individualism, refused to have the crowd driven away but did suggest to the policemen that they occasionally haul down the spectators at the windows "so that others might have a chance at the view."¹⁸

Surprise, going away, coming home, and masquerade parties were some of the favorite kinds of informal entertainment and were also a great source of pleasure to many Rochesterians.

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3. *City Directory of Rochester 1844*.
4. *City Directory of Rochester 1849-50*.
5. *City Directory of Rochester 1859*.
6. *R. D. U.*, Dec. 21 (3-2) 1855.
7. *U. & A.*, Aug. 12 (2-3) 1858.
8. *U. & A.*, Aug. 12 (2-3) 1858.
9. Blake McKelvey, *Rochester, The Water Power City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), p. 300.
10. Joan Lynn Schild "Pioneer Cabinetmakers of Rochester," *R. H. S. Scrapbook* Vol. IV, 1953.
11. *R. D. U.* Jan. 4, 1855 (1-).
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13. Augustus H. Strong, D.D., "Reminiscences of Early Rochester," *R. H. S. Publication IV*, p. 298.
14. Amy Hamner-Croughton, "Panorama of Social Rochester," *R. H. S. Publication XII*, p. 20.
15. Blake McKelvey, *Rochester The Flower City 1855-1890* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949) p. 35.
16. *City Directory of 1844*.
17. Hildegard Watson, "Radio Script: 'Silas O. Smith His House and His City'" *R. H. S. Scrapbook*, Volume I, 1950, p. 6.
18. Hamner-Croughton, *ibid.*,