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An Historic Site Tour of Old and New Landmarks

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It is almost a decade since we published, in the April 1950 issue of *Rochester History*, an account of the city's "Old and New Landmarks and Historic Houses." Since all but the library copies have long since disappeared and since that fate has also overtaken several of the old landmarks listed there, while some new ones have since arisen, it seems appropriate to bring out a revised edition. Local interest in historical tours has grown considerably in recent years, and we will therefore organize the present account with a specific route in mind. Some readers may find it convenient to consult the sketch map on the last page to locate the sites we describe.

A Downtown Walking Tour

Any tour of Rochester should begin at the old Four Corners; it should, moreover, proceed by foot, at least for the first half mile. There are too many important sites within easy reach of that historic intersection to justify a visit by motor car. Besides we will need time to stand and look, to reminisce and reflect over these downtown scenes.

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1

The *Four Corners*, long the principal hub of Rochester's street life, merits more than a passing note. Rochesterville's original log cabin of 1812; the frame tavern, handicraft shops and horse trough that soon replaced it; the brick and stone hotels and stores that arose here in the 1840's; the horse car lines that fanned out from its turntable in the sixties—all these disappeared decades ago, but the bustling activity at the Four Corners continued. Indeed that activity, propelled successively by men, by horses, by electricity, and by gasoline, flows even more rapidly today. Yet despite the changing tempo, at least one landmark has stood its ground at this site for almost a century—nine decades, to be exact.

The *Powers Block*, which occupies the choice northwest corner, is one of Rochester's most historic landmarks. When Daniel Powers, a self-made banker, projected it in the late sixties, his block seemed fantastic and many dubbed it "Powers' Folly." The fire hazard alone, in a city still dependent on wells and cisterns for its water supply, threatened the owner of a five-story building of such magnitude with inevitable ruin. But Powers had prepared to avoid that danger by adopting the new cast-iron construction developed in New York (incidentally, by a former Rochesterian who had left for the big city a decade or so before). Thus, except for its corner section, the Powers Block was built largely of iron (cast to look like stone) and glass. With its marble floors, the first in Rochester, and a passenger elevator, called a vertical railroad and the first in upstate New York, the five-story block, capped by a mansard roof over the corner section, commanded attention as the most pretentious structure in the city.

Daniel Powers was so proud of his block that he established an art gallery on the fifth floor in 1875. Soon the diminutive

size of the mansard roof over the corner section struck him as inappropriate, and he ordered its extension over the entire block, thus gaining a sixth floor with ample room for gracious social halls for Rochester's fashionable society.

The block's success in drawing the city's most affluent clients to its office floors prompted a reconstruction of the *Elwood building* on the northeast corner in the late seventies. Its architect, James G. Cutler, designed a structure of seven stories and raised a Gothic tower decked with four gargoyles, two of which peered down into the lofty office of Daniel Powers. Not to be outdone, that aging banker called in his own architect, Andrew J. Warner, and ordered the addition of a seventh story covered by a second mansard roof. And again, a few years later, when the *Ellwanger & Barry building* rose to a height of eight stories a few doors down State Street, Powers ordered the erection of still a third roof which, when completed, provided two additional floors, though only the eighth is visible from the street.

James G. Cutler, later one of Rochester's most distinguished mayors, was equally stubborn and equally resourceful. If the gargoyles or griffins he mounted on the Elwood block tower no longer appeared so menacing, the mail chute he installed in that building (enabling tenants on the upper floors to drop their letters to the ground level for quick pickup) proved a great attraction. Cutler hastened to patent the device and soon had a flock of orders from builders of the new skyscrapers going up in cities throughout the land. Cutler erected Rochester's first skyscraper himself in 1888, the 13-story *Wilder building* on the southeast corner. He installed an elevator and a mail chute, and, perhaps most gratifying of all, he finally overtopped the highest floor of the Powers Block. Nevertheless, Daniel Powers, who had erected a small tower over his elevator shaft in the early seventies, extending it up a notch or two as

each new roof arrived, now added another flight of stairs and continued to enjoy an unobstructed view from its glass-enclosed top landing for the rest of his life.

2

It was almost exactly a hundred years before the erection of the Wilder building that *Ebenezer Allan* began to clear the ground for his pioneer mill. The parking lot adjoining the Wilder building on Exchange Street extends back two blocks to cover the site once occupied by Allan's mill. An appropriate marker, formerly imbedded in the stone wall that supports the rear of the parking lot along cobblestoned Graves Street, has recently disappeared (as Allan's mill vanished, probably in an unrecorded flood or fire in 1793 or 1794), but the curious visitor will need more than a marker to reconstruct the wilderness scene that prevailed here 170 years ago. He will have to use his imagination to clear the entire city of its buildings and replant the virgin forest of maple, beech, ash, oak, elm, pine, and sycamore trees that once blanketed this region, in order to catch a glimpse of Ebenezer Allan in homespun garb chopping out a clearing along the river bank, where a natural race, skirting the small upper falls to the south, created an ideal site for his saw and grist mill in 1789.

3

Even in the musty old environs of Graves Street, with the hulks of two stone mills still bounding it to the east, Allan's era seems remote, and we will step along rapidly in time as we stroll south and mount the steps to *Broad Street Bridge* for a view of the Genesee River. Looking over the north railing, we not only see its broad and shallow bed but also note how it disappears under the arches of *Main Street Bridge*. That quaint structure,

like an aging grandfather, has sufficient beauty of character and more than sufficient historic lore to blind thoughtful observers to its dilapidated appearance. The only bridge in America to carry a major street, buildings and all, across a broad river, its uniqueness adds to its fascination, which is more reminiscent of old London Bridge than of the Ponte Vecchio in Florence.

Its historic significance lies in the fact that it bridged the gap between west- and east-side communities at a critical time and bound them into one expansive city. The buildings we see suspended along its south side were erected in the late seventies, but the bridge underneath dates from the 1850's. It is the fourth bridge on that site and, like the second and third, erected in 1824 and in 1838, had buildings along its northern edge from beginning. They remind us of the curious fact that Rochester was so crowded with traffic, even in that early day, that the only site available in 1827 for a village market was a platform extended out over the shallow river at the north-western edge of the bridge.

Broad Street Bridge on which we stand appears to be a modern structure, but if we cross over and step down onto the river plaza by the War Memorial we will note that this bridge, too, has historic underpinnings. It is, in fact, a deck built in the 1930's over the *Eric Canal Aqueduct*, which had by that date been abandoned to a subway, which also has more recently been abandoned. As we gaze at its massive stone arches we get the feeling that we are peering back through the arches of time to the days when mule-drawn canal boats glided slowly across the river on the long journey to and from Albany and Buffalo. This sturdy structure, the second one on its site, was completed in the early forties, at the time of the canal's first enlargement, and replaced the original aqueduct of 1823.

In those early canal days the site where we have paused and that across the river where the *Public Library* now stands were occupied by two of the largest flour mills of their day. They were flanked to the north on both sides of the river by a score of other flour mills which made Rochester for two decades the leading Flour City in the country. Only a few of those mills are still standing, but fortunately the river view of the library, with a series of eleven arches in its base, through which the water of the east-side raceway still tumbles on festive days, affords a suggestive reminder of that historic period. One of its many inscriptions, Knowledge is Power, is germane to any time. And the 650,000 volumes in its files, which reached a circulation of two million last year, amply demonstrate the fact.

Power of a different sort is commemorated by the *War Memorial Building*. Completed only a few years ago, its vast expanse obliterates the old west-side raceway, now filled in, and covers the old island and the adjoining bank to front on Exchange Street. Its site, too, is misty with history, for the first local residence of Col. Nathaniel Rochester, the village founder, once occupied part of this land, and years later William Kimball erected a huge tobacco factory on the island. That building, which later served as a city hall annex, had a massive smokestack on the top of which a giant-size statue of Mercury held a lofty perch for nearly six decades. Rochester's favorite skyline symbol will, we are assured, rise again on a fitting pedestal in the new *Civic Center* that is taking shape across Exchange Street to the west.

It is too early to judge the effect of this modern landmark now arising on its spacious site in the heart of the old Third Ward, but interested visitors can view a table model of the Civic Center by stepping into the old *City Hall* on our right as we proceed west on Broad Street. Few citizens will mourn the

passing of that antiquated building (1877) when the officials move into the new Civic Center in another two years or so.

4

Facing it across Fitzhugh Street is a much older building, *St. Luke's Church*. This edifice, which retains much of its original charm, dates from 1824 and is the oldest remnant of the village of Rochester still standing. Its unlocked door invites respectful inspection. At the time of its opening, this oldest Episcopal congregation already had the benefit of several years of growth in an earlier frame chapel. It shared leadership in the community with the First Presbyterian Church, opened across the street on the City Hall site that same year.

The red brick building to the right of St. Luke's Church is the Board of Education building. It was erected in 1875 as the *Free Academy* and stands on the site of the first public school opened in the village in 1813. A second and larger school on that site served as the first city high school. Their growing responsibilities matched those of the three successive court houses across the street. The first *Court House*, opened in 1822, had a graceful classical portico overlooking the village square; the second, 1850-1892, had an impressive dome with a figure of Justice perched on its top. Justice still looks down on Main Street from a niche high above the entrance of the present structure which now completely occupies the old square.

West Side Landmarks

Our stroll thus far has covered less than a half mile and another half mile would take us to the borders of the early village in almost any direction. But since Rochester is now a metropolis, perhaps we had better board a special bus or call a cab to continue our tour. Proceeding west on Buffalo Street

(pardon me, it is now called Main Street West) we cross the modern inner loop, whose first link opened at this point in 1953; we pass a modern 406 car city parking ramp and pause at No. 206 for a glance at the original home of the *University of Rochester*. This quaint old structure, built as a tavern in the 1830's served as the joint home of the university and the theological school from 1850 until 1862.

5

No resident or visitor should long delay a call at the home of Rochester's most famous resident—one who truly prized, though she never fully enjoyed, citizen rights—*Susan B. Anthony*. A drive west on Main Street, crossing Broad Street (decking the old Erie Canal), past the General Hospital (on the site of the old public cemetery) to Madison Street, will bring us to a recently restored Victorian house, No. 17, where Miss Anthony lived with her sister Mary during the last four decades of her long life. She lived here, that is, during the intervals between her innumerable journeys throughout the country campaigning valiantly for women's rights. Though her triumphs were few, the movement she so earnestly promoted ultimately won success and won her a place in the National Hall of Fame. The Susan B. Anthony House welcomes visitors daily 10 to 5, Sunday 1 to 5.

6

Miss Anthony had many loyal friends, and some scornful critics, too, in the old *Third Ward*, and we will drive back to view some of the historic houses in that choice center of the best families of the Flour City era. Many, unfortunately, have disappeared, but the Landmark Society of Western New York has saved and restored two of special note. We come first to the

Jonathan Child Mansion on South Washington Street. Built in 1837-38 by Hugh Hastings for Col. Rochester's son-in-law two years after he had resigned as first mayor of the city, this impressive structure, with five Corinthian columns adorning its front portico, was a center for many decades of fashionable life in Rochester. The early afternoon balls in its large double parlors became evening parties a decade later when gas lights displaced oil lamps, but Jonathan Child, a staunch temperance man, served no liquor and tolerated no breaches in social decorum. Child removed to Buffalo after the death of his wife in 1850, and John N. Wilder, first president of the trustees of the newly formed university, occupied this house for a year or two. Visitors wishing to learn more of its history or to examine its interior are invited to call at the Landmark Society headquarters in the Campbell-Whittlesey House (No. 8).

7

First, however, we will drive around through Livingston Park for a glance at the modern exterior of the Clark Memorial Building of the Rochester Institute of Technology, and for a pause at the one fine, old mansion that still stands on this once-gracious lane. The *Ely-Osgood House*, built in 1837 by Hugh Hastings in the Doric Temple style with balancing wings, has preserved its classical dignity through successive generations of business and professional occupants. It has served as the elegant headquarters of the Daughters of the American Revolution since 1920.

8

Turning east on Troup Street, we pass the obelisk erected by the Spiritualists in memory of the *Fox Sisters* whose strange

knockings heard in various residences on this street in 1848 gave birth to modern Spiritualism. A stone's throw beyond, we come to the *Campbell-Whittlesey House*. Built in 1835-36 for Benjamin Campbell, a prominent miller, it passed a decade later into the possession of Frederick Whittlesey, justice of the state Supreme Court. Successive generations of the Whittlesey family lived here until 1937, when the newly formed Landmark Society of Western New York acquired possession and proceeded to restore it as a superb replica of Rochester at the height of its Flour City period. Visitors are cordially welcome to enter and inspect this beautiful mansion.

East Side Landmarks

9

The Inner Loop, which speeds eastward over the Troup-Howell bridge, carries us almost to East Avenue, Rochester's proudest thoroughfare lined by arching elm trees and an eclectic collection of classical and Victorian mansions. This avenue still retains, from Alexander Street, east, much of its former splendor. Thus the *Genesee Valley Club* on our right occupies a handsome mansion built in 1842 for Aaron Erickson and long occupied by his daughter, Mrs. Gilman H. Perkins, who with her husband held a prominent position in the social and cultural life of the Flower City period.

A half block farther east, two impressive mansions in Greek Revival style face each other across the avenue. That on the right is *Woodside*, the present headquarters of the Rochester Historical Society. Built for Silas O. Smith, an early Rochester merchant, in 1839, its name recalls the time when the virgin forest still bordered the city on the east at this point. Constructed by Alfred Badger in the block-mass pattern, and

crowned by a square and cylindrical cupola, the exterior loveliness of this mansion is matched on the inside by a gracefully winding staircase that leads up into the lofty cupola. The many choice architectural features of this house have made it an ideal headquarters, since 1940, for the Rochester Historical Society which welcomes interested visitors.

The *Pitkin-Powers* house, built across the street in 1839, has recently become the property of the Boy Scouts and is being remodeled to serve as regional headquarters for the Otetiana Council.

10

Two blocks farther east stands the avenue's most impressive modern landmark—the Rochester *Museum of Arts and Sciences*. The gift of Edward Bausch, president of the Bausch & Lomb Optical Company, this fine building, opened in 1942, houses a public-supported museum of outstanding merit. A stroll through its many exhibits will lead the imaginative observer back and forth through centuries of time, through successive cultures, and through several fields of science; the experience will prompt him to make early plans for a return visit.

Across the street in a spacious lawn shaded by a great spreading elm, stands a brownstone house of particular interest. Built approximately a century before the museum by Josiah W. Bissell, who gave East Avenue its name, the brownstone house follows a design adopted by A. J. Warner from Downing's famous "Country Houses." Its successive owners included Schuyler Colfax, Jr., son of President Grant's Vice-President. In 1952 the Rochester Methodist Home acquired the property and made it a social center for the aging residents of the modern dormitories erected on the rear of its large lot. But the most distinctive feature of this house to the historian is the

material of which it is constructed, for these comely brownstones were salvaged from the wreck of the first Erie Canal aqueduct shortly after it was replaced by the present one in 1842.

11

Several blocks farther out East Avenue and on the left side, in a capacious setting at No. 900, stands the *Eastman House Museum of Photography*. Built by George Eastman in 1905, this is the largest and most elegant of Rochester's mansions. Its front portico, supported by four Corinthian Columns, ornaments but does not dominate the mass of the house, which is of Georgian Colonial design. This three-story house, built of brick with stone trim, originally contained 49 rooms, the grandest of which was the conservatory that extended up through the second floor to a glass roof long since enclosed. The conservatory housed a large pipe organ and provided the setting for many Sunday evening recitals to which, frequently, a hundred guests were invited. This mansion, willed to the university at George Eastman's death in 1932, served as the president's house until 1947 when plans to convert it into a photographic museum were launched. Opened in 1949, Eastman House museum provides Rochester with a unique attraction, a resort to which amateur and professional photographers are turning in increasing numbers to study past and present developments in this field. Visitors are cordially welcomed to view the exhibits here, to attend the film showing in the Dryden Theatre added at the left, and to see the Waterville birthplace of George Eastman which was brought to Rochester one hundred years later and reconstructed on the rear of the lot in 1954.

12

Perhaps the oldest house in Rochester and certainly one of the finest is the *Oliver Culver* house. Standing since 1906 at 70

East Boulevard, it was originally built at the corner of Culver Road and East Avenue when the latter was but a marshy forest trail leading from the hamlet of Pittsford to the abandoned mill plot at the Genesee falls. A rear section of the house dates perhaps from 1805, but the major design and structure were not fixed until 1816, and the front portion was completed two years later. The results justified the long effort; numerous critics have described the main entrance as one of the best examples of post-Colonial architecture in the Genesee Valley. Built to serve as a tavern, the second floor of this house is comprised principally of a ballroom which has a spring floor and a high arched ceiling of unusual comeliness. It is now occupied as a private residence and is maintained in a fine state of preservation.

13

A drive south on Culver Road takes us across the route of the Eastern Thruway Connection and along the edge of *Cobbs Hill Park*. Nestled comfortably between the hill and the Eric Canal widewaters, now known as Lake Riley, is one of Rochester's most significant institutions—a cluster of one-room apartments for aged citizens, all on one floor and convenient to the park's recreation center for young children.

14

Swinging left from Culver into Monroe Avenue and right into Highland Avenue, we proceed westward past the grounds of *Colgate-Rochester Divinity School*—the modern descendant of the Theological Seminary established in conjunction with the university in 1850. We next skirt the southern edge of *Highgate Park*, a crowded place at Lilac time each spring when the fragrant and many colored blossoms on this sunny

hillside attract thousands of visitors to the city's most popular festival.

15

Turning right from Highland into South Avenue, we pass one entrance to Highland Park on our right and swing left into Robinson Drive, named after one of Rochester's (and America's) early city planners. The large natural amphitheater to our left with its imposing bandshell is the site for many community programs each summer, including an annual series of Opera Under the Stars. On the slope beyond stands a statue of *Frederick Douglass*, the great Negro statesman of the Civil War period and one of Rochester's most famous citizens.

16

Robinson Drive leads us to Mount Hope Avenue, beyond which is Mount Hope Cemetery, opened in 1836 and one of the loveliest as well as the oldest urban cemeteries still in use in America. Turning right on this avenue we will pause before a modest Gothic structure designed by A. J. Davis in 1855 and built as an office for the *Ellwanger & Barry Nursery Company*. That firm, the first and long the leading nursery company in this region, helped to make Rochester the chief center in America of that industry and won it the title of Flower City. Several rare and magnificent old trees still shade its spacious estate. A gift by the aging partners of 20 choice hilltop acres provided, in 1887, the nucleus for Highland Park around which the city's park system was developed in succeeding years.

17

We will swing left through McLean Street for a fleeting glimpse in springtime of a blossom-decked orchard almost

hidden in a gully on our right—a last reminder of the enchanting verdure that once surrounded Rochester in the heyday of its nurseries. Turning left on River Boulevard, we drive south between rows of flowering crab and pear trees—an unforgettable sight in springtime—to the *River Campus*. Opened in 1930 as the Men's College, this campus has now become the busy center of the expanding University of Rochester. The new Women's Dormitory overlooking the athletic field on our left was dedicated in 1957 and inaugurated a new era of educational integration and expansion. The circular tower of Rush Rhees Library, which contains 700,000 books, dominates the campus and invites strangers to visit its halls where they can find descriptive literature on the present and past of this great institution whose humble birthplace we saw on West Main Street.

18

After a leisurely tour of the River Campus, we will drive south across Elmwood Avenue into *Genesee Valley Park*, the second largest in the city system. Its gentle contours and wide spreading greens provide a delightful setting for an 18-hole public golf course as well as numerous picnic groves and other features. Returning to Elmwood Avenue, we will drive east past the Medical School and Strong Memorial Hospital on our right, and farther on past the new 16-story State Hospital, to turn left on Goodman Street.

19

Goodman Street leads us north past another entrance to Highland Park and also past the entrance to Colgate-Rochester Divinity School on its adjoining hilltop. Proceeding north for

two miles, we finally cross East Avenue and reach the old University of Rochester Campus on University Avenue. In the center of its elm-shaded square, we come to the *Memorial Art Gallery*. Originally opened in the fall of 1913 and considerably enlarged in 1926, it is technically and administratively a branch of the university but serves in many respects as a public art gallery and receives its major support from member subscriptions. Built in the Italian Renaissance style, it has permanent collections that include medieval tapestries, Romanesque and Gothic sculpture, and one of the finest collections of French Romanesque fresco paintings in America. Its frequently changing displays bring art exhibits from all parts of the world to Rochester, while an annual Finger Lakes Exhibit engenders keen interest among local artists. A creative workshop open to children and adults, a little theater, and numerous classes, lectures, and films join with the exhibits to attract a steady stream of visitors.

20

The former Women's Campus now serves as the residential and social center for the Eastman School of Music, another branch of the university. The school proper adjoins the *Eastman Theatre* which we will see on our left after we drive down University Avenue and turn left into East Main Street and stop at Gibbs Street. Opened in 1922 as a center for the display of fine films in conjunction with the performance of fine music, it was decorated inside and out with lavish splendor and well merits a visit. After the development of sound pictures, Eastman Theatre became more exclusively a music hall, the home of the Rochester Philharmonic, an adjunct of the Eastman School, and the favorite setting for visiting orchestras and musical stars.

North Side Landmarks

21

Turning right on Gibbs Street, we pass the *Y.M.C.A.* building opened in 1916, and swing left into University Avenue; we soon catch sight of Rochester's Spanish-American War Memorial on our left, a clean-lined American eagle strong in its repose on a low perch in the small park across from the Post Office Building. (The eagle will be removed this spring to make way for the Inner Loop and will find a new site on the southeast corner of the War Memorial plaza.)

Already the workmen have cleared the tract ahead of us for this northeastern extension of the Inner Loop, and beyond it we see to our right the *New York Central Station* designed by Claude Bragdon and built (1914) in an early modern style with its great windows symbolizing the driving wheels of a locomotive. On our left we see the still more modern design of the new *Y.W.C.A.*

22

Turning right into St. Paul Street, we dip under the New York Central tracks and a block farther north reach Platt Street where we turn left to cross the Genesee on Platt Street bridge. Here we get a prize view of the *Main Falls* as the river tumbles 96 feet into the gorge below. It can be a spectacular sight after a heavy rain up the valley, but on ordinary days much of the water is diverted through huge pipes to the turbines of the Rochester Gas & Electric Co. below the west bank. Several old flour mills of a century past still line the brink of the gorge above and, with the deep and now empty wheel pits below them, recall the rumble of millstones and other early machinery long since silent in Rochester.

23

Ahead of us rises the lofty tower of the *Kodak Office Building*. Soaring to 19 stories, topped with a steep roof and lantern, this tallest structure in the city is the center of an expanding headquarters division of Rochester's leading industry. The developments on this State Street site, dating from 1883, are only part of the mushrooming activities of this great firm which employs approximately a third of the city's 110,000 industrial workers.

24

Of the many other companies that have contributed along with Eastman to Rochester's development as a center of technological industry, one of the oldest and most important is *Bausch & Lomb*. Driving north on State Street and east over the Bausch Memorial Bridge, we come to a large cluster of factory buildings, straddling St. Paul Street, where since 1874, this company has been turning out an increasing flow of optical instruments, optical glass, and related items.

25

Proceeding north on St. Paul, we pass the Hawk-Eye Division of Eastman Kodak at Driving Park Avenue and continue north to the *Veterans' Memorial Bridge* (1931), which takes us across to the vast assemblage of factories known as *Kodak Park*. Here on a plot of over 900 acres some 21,000 employees make and process the film and paper that supply most of the amateur and professional still and motion picture cameras of the country. Daily tours conducted by the company welcome interested visitors to an illuminating excursion behind its high fence.

We will end our tour by a drive north to the old stone *Lighthouse* near the mouth of the river. Erected in 1822, when the prospect that a great lake port might develop at this site had not yet been dimmed by the Erie Canal which opened the next year, this old lighthouse feebly guided a fluctuating stream of lake mariners during the next three decades. New piers and pier lights displaced it a century ago, and these in turn have served a fluctuating trade which is now again on the climb as the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway presents new opportunities for lake shipping. It is still impossible to determine, as we stand on this lighthouse knoll in the year 1960, whether Rochester's future, bypassed by the Barge Canal and now increasingly by the New York Central, will receive a new injection of vitality from Lake Ontario to the north.

