

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## Rochester in Retrospect and Prospect

BY BLAKE MCKELVEY

It was 150 years ago this summer that Colonel Nathaniel Rochester surveyed his hundred-acre tract into village lots. The first permanent settlers arrived on May 1, 1812, and that day next year will provide a suitable occasion to celebrate Rochester's sesqui-centennial. In preparation for this event it seems fitting that we, too, make a survey of the town, in historical retrospect. We will divide its growth into convenient eras—the pioneer village and boom town, the canal port and Flour City, the cosmopolitan Flower City, the Kodak City, the emerging metropolis. And since Colonel Rochester made his survey with a keen eye on the town's future prospects, we will also take a glance in that direction for good measure.

### **The Pioneer Village and Boom Town**

The site of Rochester has, from the beginning, been linked with the future rather than with the past. Ebenezer Allan, its unsuccessful promoter of 1789, quickly discovered that his crude mill on the west bank of the Genesee at the small upper falls would not conveniently serve the Seneca tribesmen scattered sparsely throughout western New York. Representing the past, few of them had any reason other than curiosity to journey 50 or 100 miles through the forest to visit Allan's mill. Even the pioneer settlers who had begun to push into the up-

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per Genesee valley had little interest in such an out-of-the-way location. They planted their villages—Geneva, Canandaigua, Bath, and Dansville, among others—on the water routes to the east or to the south. Allan soon abandoned his backwoods post, leaving the Genesee falls site to await the arrival of a man who could grasp its future potentialities.

Colonel Rochester was such a man. Journeying by horseback up the Susquehanna valley from Hagerstown, Maryland, on several land-hunting expeditions in the early 1800's, he first visited the Genesee falls in 1803. With two companions he purchased Allan's hundred-acre tract as a prospective town site. It was, of course, a speculative venture, and the three proprietors, who bought other scattered properties in the valley as well, returned south to await a sufficient settlement of the region to justify the promotion of a milltown.

Like many enterprising Americans of his day, Colonel Rochester was impatient to make a fresh start in the rich territory opening up in the interior. He accordingly moved his family in 1810 to Dansville where they could enjoy the facilities of an established town while he supervised the development of his other properties down the valley.

Many changes had occurred there since his earlier visits. New and thriving settlements had sprung up on every hand—at Avon, Bloomfield, and Batavia, even at nearby Pittsford, Penfield, and Charlotte. Spurred by the Embargo and Nonintercourse acts, which prohibited shipments to the Continent, a new trade was developing down the Genesee. Since most pioneers, with scheduled payments due on their land, were eager to ship out potash, staves, or grain, the Genesee route to the north offered a promising new outlet. Obviously a milltown at the upper falls, where the flatboats had to be unloaded and the rafts broken up, would serve this trade and prosper with it.

Thus the prospects appeared bright when Colonel Rochester

rode down from Dansville to lay out his village in the summer of 1811. A bridge was already under construction to carry the projected road from Pittsford across the river at the center of his tract. He hastened to plot its extension westward as Buffalo Street, toward which it was headed, and laid out a second broad street, also six rods wide, running north and south and crossing the former at a main four corners a short distance from the bridge. Following the prevailing gridiron pattern, he laid out several additional streets, each four rods in width, crossing the major thoroughfares at right angles. Setting aside a one-acre plot a half block west of the Four Corners for a future court house, he engaged Enos Stone, a recently arrived pioneer on the east bank of the river, as his agent and directed him to sell quarter-acre lots at \$30 to \$50 each, depending on the location, to any settlers who would agree to build on them within a year.

A dozen buyers appeared that first season, among them Hamlet Scrantom from Connecticut. The Scrantom family, the first to arrive the next spring, thus became Rochester's first permanent residents. They occupied a log cabin that summer on the site of the present Powers Block, while Hamlet pressed the construction of his own frame house and helped Abelard Reynolds and other early settlers erect similar structures nearby.

News of the outbreak of the War of 1812 reached the Genesee in June, halting trade with Canada. Farmers up the valley continued, however, to send produce down the river to provision the militia forces that soon gathered to protect the frontier. New settlers from the east were less numerous, but the millsite's location ten miles up from the river's mouth made it attractive to a number of pioneers who were abandoning the more exposed points along the lake.

"The village is flourishing beyond all calculation," Hamlet Scrantom wrote to his brother in December 1813. Among those who had erected houses, one was Jehiel Barnard, a tailor,

another, James B. Carter, a blacksmith, while Abelard Reynolds, the first to complete a frame house, served both as postmaster and tavern keeper. Scrantom, a miller by trade, took charge at first of Stone's crude sawmill across the river, but hastily transferred his services to Francis Brown when that promoter of the 200-acre tract at the main falls erected his larger mill there the next year. The first lawyer, the first doctor, and the first itinerant preacher arrived, and Miss Huldah Strong, sister of Mrs. Reynolds, gathered the younger children together for the first school held in the loft over Barnard's tailor shop. The next year brought the erection of a red mill, several additional houses, and a district school on the site of the present Board of Education building.

By the return of peace in 1815, the falls settlement had 331 residents. Several of them hastened to organize a Presbyterian Church and joined others in erecting a frame structure on stilts to accommodate varied religious services. Rival promoters were laying out town plots across the river and further north at the main falls and also at the lower falls.

Colonel Rochester, however, had increasing confidence in the potentialities of the falls site. He joined Elisha Johnson, manager of the eastside venture, in constructing a dam to supply both the eastside and westside raceways. He may have had mixed feelings when Francis Brown commenced the construction of still a third and much longer raceway along the western brink of the gorge at the main falls. Yet with five sawmills and three grist mills competing in 1816 for the lumber and grain brought down the river or hauled in by ox cart from nearby settlements, the prospect seemed bright. Some 12,000 were already resident in the towns that would later become Monroe County, and Rochester, with perhaps 600 inhabitants, got its first weekly newspaper and its first resident pastor that year.

A resurgence of settlement and trade following the war

prompted the residents of the lower Genesee townships to petition Albany for the establishment of a new county. Although temporarily repulsed in that effort, Colonel Rochester took the lead in a successful bid in 1817 for a village charter. Incorporated in an act passed on March 21, Rochesterville encompassed 655 acres on the west bank, including the 100-acre tract, the 200-acre Frankfort tract, and room to expand north, west, and south. Located as it was in Genesee County, it could not span the river to include the eastside settlements, which lay in Ontario County. When, however, the rapid growth of the lower Genesee townships finally prompted the legislature to reorganize them in 1821 as Monroe County, with its seat at Rochester, that village soon straddled the river and, by annexing the eastside settlements, increased its area to 1239 acres and its population to 2700.

A much more significant development had meanwhile transformed Rochester into America's first boom town. Talk of digging a canal across the state had been recurrent for two decades before a favorable decision was reached in April 1817. Since the canal, if built, would have to cross the Genesee between the small upper falls and the main falls, Rochester was assured full benefit. Yet no one suspected how great its impact would be.

Even Colonel Rochester, who determined at this point to move his family to the village, miscalculated the canal's influence. Still visioning a rustic village, he purchased a house erected by Dr. Levi Ward overlooking the river and the proposed canal a short distance from the Four Corners. He hastily set out a pear orchard back of the house, but before the young seedlings could blossom, they had to be uprooted to make way for a canal basin.

Interest quickened as construction of the canal commenced in the east on July 4th 1817. Many serious doubts concerning its practicality remained, but the successful completion of the

first section through Utica in 1820 restored confidence. Work started the next year on the great embankment over the Irondequoit valley east of Rochester, and a contract was let that fall for an aqueduct over the Genesee.

Rochester of course was throbbing with excitement. Its builders erected a half dozen new mills, numerous stores and shops, several taverns, and two stone churches overlooking the public square where the first court house was nearing completion. To finance these and other operations, a bank was needed, and after much bitter contention with jealous banking interests in Canandaigua and between rival local factions, Colonel Rochester secured a charter and successfully organized and opened the first bank of Rochester in the summer of 1824. The completion of the aqueduct the previous fall permitted boats from the east to cross the river that spring and to dock in Child's basin in the very heart of town. This gave a great boon to local millers and other shippers who for the first time could send their products at cheap water rates to Albany, New York, and Europe.

These developments completely transformed Rochester's situation. Prior to 1820 it had been a struggling young village of less than 1500 inhabitants, located some 30 miles northwest of Canandaigua. Five years later, with over 5000 residents, it was the largest place west of Albany. Even Utica and Buffalo were surpassed, while Canandaigua, still a quiet village of some 2000, was now 30 miles southeast of Rochester.

A host of newcomers streamed in from the east. Among them were many Irish and German immigrants who, with a few French Canadians and some 200 Negroes, gave the Genesee canal port a cosmopolitan flavor. With approximately two-score boats arriving at its docks daily in the late twenties, Rochester's imports from the east surged past \$1 million by 1827, when its exports topped that figure by at least a fifth. Many of

these boats were products of local boat yards, and the Genesee river was for a time the Erie Canal's most active contributory artery. It was time that Rochester assumed the status and secured the charter of a city.

### **Canal Port and Flour City**

Jonathan Child, son-in-law of Colonel Rochester, became in 1834 the first mayor of Rochester. Though he had lost out a few years earlier to Dr. Levi Ward in a contest to succeed the aging proprietor as president of the bank, he was, as owner of the Pilot Line and one of the town's principal merchants, closely associated with its millers. His 34 freight and packet boats maintained a regular schedule of stops and, with 125 other Rochester boats, linked the Genesee port with Albany and New York on the east and with Buffalo and the upper lakes on the west.

Local millers, increasing to twenty in number, made Rochester in the early thirties the leading producer of flour in America. Local millwrights and coopers as well as boat builders thrived, and other accessory shops appeared. Two distilleries, numerous asheries, a rope walk, an iron foundry, a window-sash factory, three tanneries, and a cotton factory were among the 137 "manufactories" listed by the first directory in 1827; only the cotton factory failed. Several busy brickyards turned out 8,000,000 bricks the next year, enabling Reynolds among others to erect more substantial buildings. The four-story Arcade was constructed for Abelard Reynolds at a cost of \$30,000; with a lofty skylight enclosing a spacious interior court that rose to the third story, it quickly became the chief business mart in town.

Absorbed by private affairs, many citizens paid scant attention to the community's civic needs. The night watch was proving increasingly difficult to maintain. Even the volunteer fire

companies, while full of enthusiasm, seldom found sufficient water to do an effective job. Yet it was the demand for an adequate market that provided a civic turning point.

The erection of a public market had several important consequences. When the village trustees voted to build it out over the river at the northwestern corner of the bridge, they supplied a precedent that stimulated the construction of other buildings over the river. The northern edge of the bridge was soon completely spanned, but a half century would pass before the southern edge was similarly enclosed. Meanwhile the trustees, in order to finance the market's construction, authorized a sale of bonds. Their action not only plunged the town into debt but by so doing convinced many citizens that Rochester needed a city charter to permit an orderly development of its functions.

The campaign for a charter was, unfortunately, soon embroiled in politics. Although, after prolonged agitation, the Democratic legislature drafted a charter that Buffalo and Utica accepted in 1832, Rochester rejected it on the grounds that one clause authorized a state-appointed recorder to attend and vote on the local council. The Whigs, who held out, finally secured the passage in 1834 of a modified charter that safeguarded local autonomy. They proceeded to capture all of its ten seats and to elect Jonathan Child as mayor. With its boundaries extended to encompass 4819 acres, Rochester's population reached 12,252, and the number of children among them forced early action on the school problem.

Urgent as Rochester's educational needs were, another issue took precedence. A bustling canal port, Rochester had attracted a host of boatmen and other transients, many of whom were eager to slake their thirst at one of the numerous grog shops that now bordered the canal. The village had in fact acquired the character of a "hot spot," and was widely known as such in 1829 when Sam Patch made his fateful visit. A popular acrobat



whose specialty was falls jumping, Sam Patch had a catchy motto, "Some things can be done as well as others," but his luck ran out on Friday, November 13, that year. Some of the thousands who watched his fatal jump at the main falls of the Genesee did not sleep well for several nights. And when Charles G. Finney, the revivalist, came to Rochester a few weeks later, he found the atmosphere so charged that his religious and temperance exhortations proved most effective and endured long enough to assure victory to the Whigs in 1834.

In rapidly growing Rochester, however, opinions changed quickly, and the second council, elected in 1835, voted its approval of liquor licenses. Jonathan Child, unwilling to sign such permits, resigned to be succeeded by Jacob Gould, a shoe merchant-manufacturer and a Democrat who enjoyed a drink himself occasionally. Mayor Gould signed many licenses, but he also tackled the joint problems of digging a sewer along Buffalo Street and paving its surface. Such outlays soon plunged the city again into debt and brought the Whigs back into power.

Their economy plank proved embarrassing a year later, however, when the depression of 1837 brought a demand for relief. Thomas Kempshall, mayor that year, was glad to pass the office along to Elisha Johnson, the eastside promoter, an able engineer and a Democrat who promptly launched extensive public works. Thomas H. Rochester, eldest living son of the founder, succeeded as mayor in 1839 and gave Whig support to a bill introduced the year before by the Democrats authorizing the creation of a school board. The bill consolidated the existing districts into one system, but since its passage was further delayed, the new board did not take over until June 1841.

Rochester suffered less than most cities from the depression of the late thirties. Its good fortune sprang from the state's

decision to build a costly new aqueduct over the Genesee at this time. That \$445,347 project made necessary by the near collapse of the first aqueduct, supplied many jobs and helped to sustain the local economy.

Yet many individual merchants and millers faced bankruptcy. The mansions erected a few years before for Benjamin Campbell and Hervey Ely passed to other hands. Although these and other millers recovered and enjoyed many more prosperous years, their dominance was past. They shared leadership during the forties with merchants, lawyers, bankers, and especially with the fortunate owners of well-situated tracts. As the two political parties held a fairly even representation among these groups, and also among the voters, they traded offices back and forth almost annually; seldom did a man serve more than a year in any one post.

Interest focused on other matters in the late forties. The pioneer railroads, built from Rochester to Batavia and to Canandaigua in the previous decade, had proved their value, and new lines were eagerly discussed. A number of ingenious mechanics had developed thriving machine shops, several of which, with a dozen other factories, employed fifty or more men each at the mid-century. Merchant-manufacturers were absorbing an increasing share of the shoe and clothing trade, employing scores of such craftsmen in central shops or sending the work out for completion at home. Rochester developed a new specialty as a number of skilled nurserymen discovered the joint advantages presented by the canal and by Lake Ontario. The latter, serving as a temperature stabilizer, warded off severe freezes, while the former assured local nurserymen a head start, in competition with eastern rivals, on shipments to the west.

Rochester was becoming interested in cultural matters, too. An earlier Athenaeum and Mechanics Association, joined

under the vigorous leadership of Henry O'Reilly, editor of the town's first daily, which started in 1826, had now become a vital community forum and maintained a well-patronized library on the second floor of the Arcade. A score of churches and Sunday schools served all elements of the population. When the dominant Presbyterians, inspired by a second Finney revival, tried unsuccessfully to establish a college in Rochester, the Baptists took up the effort and, with the support of Dr. Chester Dewey, principal of the leading academy, and other prominent citizens, ambitiously launched in 1850 both the University of Rochester and the Rochester Theological Seminary.

### **The Cosmopolitan Flower City**

In spite of its achievements, Rochester in the mid-fifties seemed to many old residents to have passed its prime. Flour milling was moving west to be near the great wheat fields of that region, and many restless sons of the pioneers were moving on, too. Lured by the discovery of gold in California and by opportunities to plant new towns there or in other new territories, many old Americans were again pulling up stakes and heading west.

But if Rochester's advantages seemed to some former inhabitants overshadowed, many newcomers from abroad were finding them attractive. Slowly those community leaders who remained discovered that the city's chief asset was no longer the Genesee, cascading over its falls, nor the canal, though it bore an increasing load of freight to and from the upper lakes, but the stream of immigrants bringing untiring energies, fresh skills, and eager hopes for the future.

Again it was not what Rochester had to offer, but what they could make of the city that attracted these newcomers. Many, with special talents, created their own jobs and established new firms. John Jacob Bausch and Henry Lomb, James Cunning-

ham, William Gleason, George Taylor, each introduced a fresh line of goods and soon supplied employment to skilled newcomers from their homelands. Industrious shoemakers, some from England and Germany, enterprising clothing merchants, most of them German Jews, introduced the newly invented sewing machines and other devices to speed production by an increasing number of "hands." Henry Bartholomay's Brewing Company had a German flavor, but it was the nurseries developed by George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry that provided the greatest fragrance and transformed the Flour City into the Flower City.

This transition was not unopposed. A Know Nothing or old American Party, endeavoring to stem the tide of immigrants and to freeze them out of politics, captured the city briefly in the mid-fifties. But the issues of freedom versus slavery for the Negro and of union versus secession for the South soon brushed nativism aside.

In the frightful ordeal of the Civil War, when these issues were resolved, Rochester along with other Northern communities discovered and learned to value the added strength the numerous immigrants had brought. A city of 50,000 in the early sixties, it numbered half the total of Monroe County and supplied 5000 recruits, most of whom were first or second generation Americans. One of the latter was Col. Patrick O'Rorke, commander of the 140th New York Volunteers. His heroic death at the head of that Rochester regiment on Little Roundtop, where it successfully beat off a Confederate attack and saved the day at Gettysburg, became a symbol of patriotic bravery in his home town.

It required a depression to clinch this lesson. When the post-war boom in railroads and other vast schemes brought a series of financial quakes in the early seventies, bankers at Rochester, looking about for new sources of strength, elected Patrick

Barry, George Ellwanger, and other representatives of the new ethnic groups as trustees. Barry had previously won their backing for his pioneer horse-car line in 1863. The enterprise of many other newcomers helped to assure their acceptance as part of a united community. Reinvigorated in this fashion, Rochester survived the cruel hardships of the mid-seventies and emerged as a cosmopolitan Flower City.

In addition to the lush verdure of its nurseries—the largest in America for several decades—in addition also to the continental style and high fashion of its women's shoes and its men's clothes, and to the scientific quality of its optical instruments, these newcomers brought a fresh taste for music and drama, a greater variety of sports and amusements, and a new appreciation for art and science. Struggling local champions of each of these cultural interests, who had carried on from an earlier period, were now greatly stimulated. Supported by their new friends from abroad, they opened an Academy of Music and Art in the spacious loft of the Rochester Savings Bank, revived both the library and the educational functions of the defunct Athenaeum, and developed a number of sports teams of high repute.

Each of these and several other cultural interests experienced a succession of revivals and rejuvenations as the Flower City preened itself. Daniel W. Powers, the self-made banker who erected Rochester's first cast-iron business block in the late sixties, topping it as the years passed with three successive mansard roofs in order to retain the loftiest structure in town, also installed a gallery of European art treasures and copies on its fifth floor, superseding the earlier academy of art. The Rochester Philharmonic Society took over that former body's musical functions and maintained an orchestra of respectable quality. As the Reynolds Library emerged from the remains of old Athenaeum's book collection, Mechanics Institute inherited

that association's responsibilities for practical education, while the Rochester Academy of Science assumed the task of cultivating adult interests in its field. Able professors at the university cooperated with learned men in the city in other rewarding associations that contributed richly to community life. Even the women shared increasingly in these benefits.

Nurtured by this envisionment, a number of citizens achieved wide fame that redounded to Rochester's credit. Best known, of course, was Susan B. Anthony, a champion of women's suffrage. Equally distinguished and more original was Lewis Henry Morgan, father of American anthropology. Also deserving of mention were Henry A. Ward, promoter of natural science museums, Lewis Swift, the self-made astronomer, and Seth Green, America's pioneer fish culturist.

Though less widely influential, several men who became specialists in civic fields served the city unstintingly for many years. The old practice of electing a new mayor every year was broken by Henry L. Fish who carried on for two consecutive terms in a trying time. Shortly thereafter Cornelius R. Parsons held the post for fourteen years. Dr. Edward Mott Moore, a public spirited physician, helped to found and long served the Rochester park system; Emil Kuichling gave his best years to the city as its engineer, and John Bower helped to establish fiscal integrity in several public departments.

Religious leaders of note revealed the new diversity Rochester had attained. President Martin B. Anderson of the university and President Augustus H. Strong of the seminary led the Baptists; Rev. James B. Shaw, the Presbyterians, Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, the Catholics, Rabbi Max Landsberg, the Jews, and Newton Mann, the Unitarians. The Y.M.C.A., established in 1863, took new life under the leadership of Professor George M. Forbes in the eighties. Although old American traditions still predominated, numerous foreign-language churches,

clubs, and newspapers demonstrated the breadth of Rochester's cosmopolitan character.

Important natives likewise arose in the industrial field. When Henry O'Reilly, Rochester's versatile Irishman, failed in his attempt to organize an efficient telegraph system, Hiram W. Sibley founded Western Union and achieved nation-wide sway. George B. Selden, a patent lawyer, first successfully adapted the internal combustion engine to road-vehicular propulsion and secured a U. S. patent on the automobile. None succeeded so remarkably as George Eastman, who perfected dry-plate photography, produced a simple camera for amateur use, and invented a flexible film—the three basic ingredients of a new industry that launched Rochester on a fresh era of expansion.

### **The Kodak City**

The phenomenal success of the Eastman Co. first attracted attention during the depression of the mid-nineties. While many firms collapsed or seriously curtailed their forces, Eastman continued to expand. Several other companies held their own or quickly recovered. Keen observers could not help noting that all the more fortunate manufactured either patented or top-grade products. It soon became evident that Rochester, lacking convenient access to rich coal or mineral resources, could not compete in the heavy-industry field or in that of mass-production. It would have to rely on the ingenuity of its technicians, the skills of its workers, and the enterprise of their managers.

These basic essentials prompted a sober look at the public schools and other nurseries of local talent. The schools, in fact, were in a deplorable condition. Long regarded as a source of political patronage, they had become both costly and inefficient. In an earnest effort to free them from partisan domination, Joseph T. Alling formed a Good Government movement in the

mid-nineties that ousted the long-dominant Republican administration. When, however, his Democratic allies proved unable to effect reform, Alling made a truce with George W. Aldridge, the Republican boss, who promised independence to the schools.

A new and progressive school board took over in 1900 and soon raised the standing of Rochester schools to a high level. In their efforts to improve conditions there, however, the reformers discovered other civic needs. Under Alling's leadership they persuaded Boss Aldridge and his successive mayors, notably James G. Cutler and Hiram H. Edgerton, to give Rochester the quality services its industrial specialty demanded.

The influence of the Good Government clubs was far reaching. They won support for Dr. George Goler's forthright and progressive measures to safeguard public health. They revitalized the parks, supplying recreational facilities and cultural features to match their horticultural charms, and launched a separate playground movement. They backed Joseph M. Quigley's efforts to maintain an efficient police force and spurred the establishment of a Children's Court of which John B. M. Stephens became judge. They promoted the development of a top-notch fire department and the adoption of all recommended fire precautions. They endorsed the first city-planning efforts and supported City Engineer Edwin A. Fisher's practical steps in that direction.

These achievements were part of a widespread civic awakening that produced unusual results in Rochester partly because of its industrial specialty, but also because of the religious and cultural rejuvenation that sprang from its broad cosmopolitan base. By 1920, when Rochester's population numbered almost 300,000, with another 56,000 in the rest of the county, at least 60 per cent of the total were first or second generation Americans.



The influx of thousands of newcomers from abroad had presented a challenge to the older churches. Many immigrants brought staunch religious ties with them, as the growth of Catholic and Lutheran churches and Jewish synagogues demonstrated. Local Baptists and Methodists helped their fellow believers from abroad established foreign-language churches; both founded chapels to attract others to their fold. The Rochester Theological Seminary had early created a German Baptist Department under Dr. August Rauschenbusch whose son, Walter, Rochester born and educated, returned in 1898 after advanced study in Germany and after several years of practical experience in New York with a new vision of Christian service.

To translate that vision into persuasive theory and practical action, Rauschenbusch needed the cooperation of like-minded men, and these he found in abundance at Rochester. Several downtown churches had already opened social centers to accommodate the poor working classes that surrounded the central district; others established missions in outlying immigrant neighborhoods. The Sabbath schools, the Y.M.C.A., and the first local settlement houses were making independent efforts to meet the city's challenge.

Rauschenbusch soon found among their leaders a number of congenial spirits—the Rev. William T. Brown at old Plymouth Congregational, Dr. Algernon Crapsey at St. Andrew's Episcopal, Dr. William R. Taylor at Brick Presbyterian, Dr. William C. Gannett at First Unitarian, the Rev. Paul Moore Strayer at Third Presbyterian, Joseph T. Alling as president of the Y.M.C.A., and Richard Kitchelt, a leader of the Labor Lyceum. Rubbing shoulders and exchanging ideas with these and other men in day-to-day efforts in the city, Rauschenbusch prepared a fresh new statement of the social gospel that gave

new strength to the cause in Rochester and exerted a profound influence throughout the land.

Indeed Edward J. Ward, one of his early students at the seminary, was called back to Rochester in 1907 to assume charge of a significant new program. The Social Center movement represented a fresh effort by the Board of Education to meet the challenge of overcrowded and disordered neighborhoods. By designating as social centers four schools in areas that lacked other suitable facilities, it launched an experiment in neighborhood rejuvenation that quickly attracted wide interest. Under Ward's direction these buildings were opened on successive evenings to varied groups of men, women, and youths from the neighborhood. Although the forums they conducted and the parties they staged had a foreign and sometimes a radical tinge that eventually prompted Boss Aldridge to cut off the appropriation, they engendered a fresh spirit in their neighborhoods and won such acclaim in national journals that Ward received a call to Milwaukee before his dismissal in Rochester took effect.

It was not a fear of radicalism but indignation over the open attacks on the boss that led Aldridge to terminate the social centers. Rochester had its socialists, some in high places, but the great body of workers was unaffected by their doctrine. Most unionists, organized in the Central Trades & Labor Council, were eminently conservative, at least in politics. Strong in the building trades, the clothing and shoe industries, and a few other lines, unions had scarcely penetrated the new technological firms, and most of these companies were determined to keep them out. Again George Eastman supplied the lead.

Although Eastman was almost unknown in the business community when the Chamber of Commerce made its appearance in 1888, within two short decades his leadership was unquestioned and his bounty enabled it to build a commodious

new headquarters in 1916. Eastman had warded off unionization drives at his plants by progressive advances in wages and fringe benefits, especially after the threat became apparent around 1900. A cut in the workday from ten to nine hours the next year and the provision in succeeding years of dining rooms, restrooms with lockers, reading rooms, recreational facilities, and emergency hospital quarters in each of the larger factories assured more efficient as well as more contented workers. In 1911 he placed half a million in a retirement benefit fund; the next year he announced the first regular wage dividend.

Other Rochester industrialists watched these developments with interest. Several, impressed by the results, began to emulate Eastman, though only one ventured to pay wage dividends. Industrial wages advanced progressively, if slowly, and encouraged workmen to make down payments on their homes and to assume the status of permanent residents. When the building trades, despite their higher wage rates, struck for further increases to offset the short building season, Eastman took the lead in organizing a Community Conference Board to promote more active construction programs throughout the year and in other ways to safeguard the city's industrial peace. Only in the clothing industry did labor and management reach full agreement by signing a pact in 1919 providing for an impartial arbitrator as a guarantee of continued harmony.

Good wages were not the only prerequisite for industrial peace and productive efficiency. Skilled craftsmanship, scientific knowledge, even artistic sensitivity were likewise important, and Eastman among others hastened to promote them. His first large local gift provided for the erection in 1900 of the Eastman building of Mechanics Institute. That contribution (\$200,000) rallied wide support for an institution long maintained almost singlehandedly by Henry Lomb. Eastman's

early interest in practical education prompted a smaller gift to the university for a physics laboratory in 1906, and he did not begin to expand his support until 1912 when a \$500,000 gift for general educational purposes at the university marked a turning point. From that date his donations increased in number and volume and brought new vitality to the university, to local hospitals, and to other struggling institutions. His example established a tradition of local giving that brought the Community Chest into being in 1920 and thereby supplied Rochester with one of its most useful institutions.

Eastman's interest in science was matched if not surpassed by his devotion to music. Much of his social life was centered in the Sunday musicales held with considerable regularity at his new mansion opened on East Avenue in 1905. His increasing support of the orchestra and of a struggling music academy culminated in a decision in 1919 to establish a fully endowed School of Music as a part of the University and to maintain a Philharmonic Orchestra of professional quality in a sumptuous new theater to be erected on East Main Street. Its dedication in October 1921 marked a high point in the Kodak City era.

Thought less climatic, the decision of the university in the early twenties to develop a new Men's Campus in the great bend of the river south of Rochester, and its earlier decision, supported by George Eastman, to establish a new School of Medicine and Dentistry nearby, were equally significant. A gift by Mrs. James Sibley Watson in 1912 had provided for the erection of the Memorial Art Gallery on the Prince Street campus, and the city finally moved that same year to establish both a public library and a municipal museum. Although these latter institutions were shabbily housed in the abandoned quarters of the old Western House of Correction, their creation gave promise of future growth. Louis D. Brandeis, in an address that October opening the third season of the City Club, hailed these

and other accomplishments as evidence that Rochester was endeavoring to live up to its motto, the "Home of Quality Products."

Outstanding among its accomplishments were the number and variety of its charitable organizations. The earlier traditions of the cosmopolitan city were partly responsible, since both the Germans and the Jews had faithfully maintained relief and benefit agencies while the Catholics were similarly staunch in this respect. A devoted group of ladies, organized by Susan B. Anthony in 1893 as the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, helped to launch many worthy causes. The People's Sunday Evening services, conducted for several years in a downtown theater by Rauschenbusch and Strayer, inspired other welfare efforts, including the formation in 1910 of United Charities, an organization which endeavored to coordinate the work of 39 charitable agencies. While doctrinal differences and bitter jealousies obstructed that effort, the action of the City Club in holding the first of a long series of New Citizen banquets in July 1910, at which members played host to newly naturalized citizens, demonstrated a strong desire for community integration.

The First World War diverted Rochester's attention from local self-improvement to national and world causes. Defense and military orders enabled local firms to demonstrate the quality of their products. Pleas for assistance, coming from Belgium and other war-ravaged countries, stirred an unprecedented response, leading to the formation of the War Chest in 1918 and then of the Community Chest. But the war's most important local effect was to renew the citizen's sense of loyalty to the nation, first kindled during the Civil War, and to dedicate him anew to the cause of democracy in a broader sense. If the war, to which Monroe County sent 18,119 combatants and in which it suffered 609 fatal casualties, 512 of them from Roch-

ester, failed to "make the world safe for democracy," it at least committed America to that cause and gave many in Rochester, as elsewhere, broader horizons. It also released a burst of vitality that assured the Kodak City metropolitan status.

### **An Emerging Metropolis**

A surge of optimism quickened many Rochesterians in the mid-twenties. The bright prospects of a dozen major firms and of many lesser establishments seemed to reflect if they could not match Eastman's success. A promise of great developments at the university and in other cultural institutions kindled hopes in the civic field, where a new city-manager government was about to take over. Many felt confident that Rochester could surely become, as George Eastman phrased it, "the best city in the world in which to live and raise a family."

In the rapidly contracting world of the last three decades, the fortunes of the emerging metropolis on the Genesee have been more closely linked than ever before with state, national, and international trends. And to many citizens the decisions made in popular elections have seemed increasingly important. Nevertheless Rochester's views on the local and national levels have not always been in harmony.

Although the Good Government movement had subsided some years before, the battle for a city-manager charter rallied similar interests. Isaac Adler, one of Alling's former lieutenants, now assumed leadership. He received much assistance from professionals brought in by Eastman to staff the Bureau of Municipal Research and by the Women's City Club, which became under Mrs. Helen Probst Abbott a most effective action group. Adler, Mrs. Abbott, and Leroy Snyder of the Bureau outmaneuvered the political successors of Boss Aldridge. They won the adoption of the city-manager amendments in 1925 and the election two years later of a friendly council, which chose

Stephen B. Story of the Bureau as city manager. The struggle was not over, however, and as Story's outlays on civic improvements mounted, the old party chiefs rallied additional strength from tax-conscious landlords.

Before that battle came to a head, however, Rochester found itself in the midst of a depression that completely overshadowed all predecessors. The reaction at the start was one of confidence. A Civic Committee on Unemployment, headed by Henry H. Stebbins, Jr., boldly tackled the crisis. It collected pledges from thousands of individuals to expend \$6,000,000 on private improvements; it also encouraged the city manager to launch several work-relief projects. The unprecedented extent of the local effort plunged the city deeply into debt and brought the Republicans back into power. Yet their efforts at economy likewise proved futile, and as the popular demand for more effective action swept Hoover out of the White House in 1932, it proceeded a year later to sweep the local Republicans from City Hall.

The Democrats who took over in January 1934 choose Harold W. Baker as city manager. A former Republican, he had accepted a New Deal appointment at Washington and now cooperated with successive federal relief measure. Rochester learned its dependence on a prosperous national economy and gave hearty support to Roosevelt's successive candidacies. Locally, however, the heavy debt burden created a strong demand for economy. When the Democrats, weakened by a patronage squabble, lost the city council, the Republicans soon replaced Baker by Louis B. Cartwright, who pledged a progressive eradication of the debt. His hold-the-line policy won repeated endorsements at the polls and shifted Rochester's civic program into low gear. A population drop in the thirties, the first in Rochester's history, confirmed the mood for retrenchment, which permeated many facets of city life.

Even in industry a new emphasis on security appeared. Marion B. Folsom at Kodak became an early advocate of unemployment insurance and devised a plan whereby fourteen Rochester firms pledged to set aside reserves for that purpose. That announcement in 1931 attracted wide interest and soon brought Folsom a call to Washington to help devise a national program in that field and in social security. The Eastman Co. made its first payments, as pledged, in 1933, but renewed activity there soon eliminated that necessity. Expanding production at Kodak and at several other plants began to restore the city's economy in the mid-thirties, yet a mounting opposition among business leaders to the New Deal, contrasting with continued popular support, created a local division that checked recovery.

It was only when the outbreak of war in Europe inundated Rochester firms with new defense and war orders that the economy was galvanized to action. Pearl Harbor brought sober responsibilities to some 30,000 men and women who joined the armed services; it also stirred unprecedented home-front responses in war-relief contributions, salvage collections, war-bond savings, and, most important of all, industrial output. The numbers thus employed, 40 per cent of them women, climbed to 121,000 by 1943 when the crescendo on the battle front was beginning to rise. Monroe County's fatal casualties reached 1139 by the close of 1945, a heavy burden of sorrow shared by all elements of the population. Most citizens also shared a sense of pride in the unity of their effort and in the volume and quality of its output.

As Rochester thus acquired a new conception of its industrial capabilities, it also achieved a new recognition of its world-wide responsibilities. The roles played by Dexter Perkins, Harper Sibley, and other local representatives, if modest at international councils, nevertheless linked the community with these developments and inspired grass-roots support for other mani-



festations of international good will. The more significant roles played by Rochester scientists in the making of the bomb and in subsequent aspects of the atomic energy program made Rochester an important world center in this field.

As industry seized its postwar and then its cold war opportunities with renewed vigor, the city experienced a resurgence of confidence. After successfully paying off most of the debt, City Manager Cartwright prepared to launch a widespread rehabilitation program. With state aid and encouragement, the city erected Hanover Houses, a public housing project that soon prompted it to undertake a broader slum-clearance program in the adjoining Baden-Ormond area. Cartwright initiated and his successor Robert P. Aex soon launched a county-backed plan for a new civic center and an even broader plan, in conjunction with the state, for the building of inner and outer arterial loops and expressway connections with the state Thruway.

Progress in these fields, highlighted by the 1955 opening of the War Memorial, the first of the new Civic Center buildings, focused attention on Rochester's emerging metropolitan stature. Although industrial employment, after recovering from its postwar dip, exceeded 114,000 in a few months, it leveled off at between 108,000 and 110,000 as automation absorbed much of the burden of increased production. Non-industrial employment, on the other hand, continued to rise and at a faster rate than the population.

The latter growth, now almost exclusively in the suburbs, further emphasized the city's metropolitan character. And while most of the new residential, commercial, and industrial construction occurred on the periphery, a resurgence of vitality soon appeared downtown. A vigorous effort by City Manager Aex to provide metered off-street parking lots and to erect municipal ramp garages contributed greatly to the revival of the business district. The vast Midtown Plaza project, launched

by the Forman and McCurdy brothers, sparked serious discussion of other redevelopment schemes that may finally restore the Genesee River to its proper place in Rochester.

While civic and economic renewal thus commanded first attention, Rochester was assuming metropolitan dimensions in social and cultural fields, too. Its Community Chest and Council of Social Agencies prepared to represent and serve the entire county. They sparked a series of studies of park and playground needs and youth problems that led to the creation of a county Youth Board and the plotting of a long-term program of recreational improvements. They initiated other surveys of health and hospital and elder-citizens needs that produced important new measures in each field. Many social workers joined with other citizens in a campaign to break down the discriminatory practices that still obstructed the advance of Negro and other minorities. A rapid growth in the number of non-whites resident in the city—a 200 per cent increase during the fifties—tended to accentuate these hostilities and prompted the creation of a local Human Relations Commission and the establishment of a SCAD office to correct them.

Progress in the cultural field was even more striking. A consolidation of the men's and women's college on the river campus prompted impressive new additions to its plant and a still more significant expansion of the graduate programs, in both science and the humanities. Old Mechanics Institute, reorganized as the Rochester Institute of Technology, experienced a resurgence downtown. Local Catholics, who had recently dedicated a new campus for Nazareth College, established and opened the new St. John Fisher College as well. Resurgent vitalities in the population brought a tremendous increase in the number of school children, even in the supposedly stable city, and forced the adoption of a new program of expansion in the elementary and high schools. The clear prospect that this

wave of eager students would soon reach the college level prompted the decision to establish a new community college.

### **“Some Things Can Be Done as Well as Others”**

As we look about today in throbbing, fast-changing Rochester, Sam Patch's old motto springs to mind. We have reached a turning point in the city's development and many important decisions confront us.

Thus while population forecasters see a stabilized total of 315,000 for the city, they predict a growth of 100,000 a decade in the towns. The suburbs will exceed the city in numbers by 1965 raising new problems of leadership as more powers pass to the large and imperfectly representative board of supervisors. The new homes can continue to spread out in a haphazard splatter as at present, or they could be channeled into village clusters and separated by broad greenbelts. The latter scheme, widely favored by community organizers, would require careful, imaginative planning and would entail responsible decision-making on a metropolitan level for which Rochester is not as yet equipped.

Rochester is already engaged in one urban renewal project and is considering a second. As its efforts to clean out the ring of blight that surrounds the downtown district gather momentum, it will have an opportunity to apply neighborhood planning principles to the inner city. Its park and playground surveys already embody such concepts, and if it can resolve the integration problem (make Rochester a symbol of equality, as the Human Relations Commission has put it) it should be able to redevelop the old Third Ward and other fringe areas as wholesome communities.

Among other things that can be done, in the rebuilding of downtown Rochester, is to restore the Genesee to its proper function—a refreshing inspiration to busy citizens. A river

plaza on both banks from Andrews to Main Street, with open vistas on both sides of the latter bridge, would help to make the business district interesting and attractive to pedestrians—which includes most of us most of the time. As the Civic Center and Midtown plazas become available, we may find a downtown stroll again delightful provided the flood of cars does not make them inaccessible oases, as the plaza back of the War Memorial generally appears to be.

Rochester's moderate size as a metropolis and its distant separation from other metropolitan complexes have made it more hospitable to automobiles than most large cities. It is opening new channels for their easy circulation and is erecting additional storage facilities, both of which promise to attract more drivers to the central business district. With 250,000 cars in the metropolitan district today, the jam is not often too great, but as that number mounts to 350,000 within the next two decades, the oft-proposed subsidy to buses may prove both attractive and economically sound.

Fortunately Rochester's modest size as a metropolis is already sufficient to maintain most of the institutions that serve man's cultural needs. We can hope that continued growth will enhance rather than diminish the citizen's opportunities to participate in social and intellectual activities. Certainly the opening of a new Community College and the continued expansion of the university and other institutions of higher learning hold rich promise for many, while the libraries, museums, and galleries are progressively improving their services. If we can safely envision an effective program of educational television, extending their cultural facilities widely throughout the metropolitan area, the future prospects seem much brighter at the Genesee falls today than when Colonel Rochester laid out the town 150 years ago.