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Colonel Nathaniel Rochester

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As Rochester prepares to celebrate the Sesqui-Centennial of its permanent settlement, in the spring of 1812, our thoughts go back to the character and achievements of the town's chief founder, whose name we bear. Although Colonel Rochester did not move his family to the village at the falls until 1818, he maintained a constant watch over its development. He frequently journeyed on horseback down the valley, at first from Dansville and later from Bloomfield, to launch new undertakings in person and to give direction at critical stages. With several sons and sons-in-law, he supplied leadership for another decade in the successful establishment of a prosperous village.

Of course the Genesee falls offered exceptional advantages as a town site. A few early travelers, recognizing that fact, had predicted the rise there of an important inland city, yet its development awaited the occupation of the surrounding territory. It was clear, however, that the settlement, once established, would not long remain a hamlet, but just where and how it would grow depended on the leadership it received. Fortunately Colonel Rochester possessed the necessary talent and, with a rich background of experience in town building, was able to guide the community through its early troubled years.

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Colonel Rochester was sixty years old when permanent settlement commenced at the Genesee falls. Six feet tall and slender in frame, with his hair turning gray, the proprietor had a venerable appearance. He generally carried a cane, yet his step was quick and his visage commanding. Friends and strangers alike were impressed by the dignity of his Southern manners and by his soldierly bearing. His very presence lent confidence, and the good judgment he displayed on numerous occasions helped to draw the divergent inhabitants into a unified and dynamic community.

Years of Training

Of course Colonel Rochester's good judgment was the product of many years of experience. The responsibilities he had previously shouldered, at first in Hillsborough, North Carolina, then in Hagerstown, Maryland, and later in Dansville, New York, had both steeled his nerve and taught a measure of tolerance and forbearance. He had learned to work with people of diverse origins and varied dispositions, and he had acquired a flexibility that enabled him to face new problems with the freshness of youth. Self-taught, as were the great majority of his generation, he had faithfully mastered each lesson and was ready to provide the new community with a model proprietor.

Thus the record of those first six decades merits close study. Born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, almost twenty years to the day after George Washington's birth and twenty-five miles from the latter's family home, Nathaniel Rochester links the beginnings of our city with the great Revolutionary era. He was scarcely two years old when his father died in 1754. After five years of hardship, his mother remarried, and in 1763 the family, minus the eldest son (John, 19) who inherited the farm, moved to Granville County, North Carolina. At the age of six-

teen Nathaniel found employment with James Monroe, a merchant in nearby Hillsborough, and in five years he became a full partner. He also served in these youthful years as clerk of the local vestry, as a member of the Committee of Safety organized in the county, and as its delegate to the state's first Provincial Convention.

By the age of twenty-four he had won recognition as a leader in sparsely-settled Orange County, North Carolina. Events of the next decade considerably broadened his horizon. Appointed a Major of Militia and Paymaster to the Troops, young Rochester soon found himself in command of a force of men dispatched in pursuit of a loyalist regiment retreating across the state. He handled that assignment with skill, but the task of collecting provisions and other supplies in the scattered hamlets and ports of North Carolina and Virginia proved too arduous, and Rochester suffered a physical breakdown, which obliged him to resign from the service.

On his recovery, Rochester returned to Hillsborough where he was promptly elected a member of the state assembly. Other appointments followed, among them a full Colonelcy of Militia in 1777. He was also named a Commissioner that year to establish and superintend an arms factory at Hillsborough and made his first journey north into Pennsylvania in search of the necessary equipment. As the tide of battle moved elsewhere, the young Colonel again resigned, this time to enter a business partnership in 1778 with Thomas Hart, the town's leading merchant whose daughter, Lucretia, would later marry Henry Clay.

Hart and Rochester removed to Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1780. There the younger man, at the age of thirty-six, found a wife, Sophia Beatty, fourteen years his junior. It was to prove a happy and fruitful marriage. Of the twelve children—all but one born at Hagerstown during the next twenty years—only

two died in infancy and nine survived to accompany their parents on the historic migration north to the Genesee Country in 1810.

Before he was ready for that move, however, Colonel Rochester added several cubits to his stature. With Hart as partner he rented a gristmill and established a nail and rope factory. When the partners agreed to separate in 1792, Rochester continued to manage the gristmill and engaged in ever-widening commercial operations. He served as a member of the Maryland legislature for one session and as postmaster for two years. Though elected a judge in 1797, he resigned on discovering that legal training was essential to the proper conduct of that office. He early performed the functions of a private banker and took the lead in 1807 in founding the Hagerstown Bank of which he became first president, keeping the accounts and the funds in a separate room in his own home.

Rochester had built the central section of his spacious house, called Mount Prospect, in 1789, and it was still the most elegant in the town now grown to 2000 inhabitants. Two of his fellow directors were rich landowners in neighboring districts—Colonel William Fitzhugh and Major Charles Carroll. Like other venturesome men of the period, they were interested in acquiring additional lands on the frontier. Many, including Rochester's brother-in-law and his former partner, had been attracted to Kentucky and the West. Colonel Rochester had made some investments there himself, but Fitzhugh and Carroll were early drawn north to the Genesee. They persuaded Colonel Rochester to accompany them on a prospecting visit to that country in September 1800.

On that occasion his younger associates acquired large tracts in the central valley at \$2.00 an acre. Colonel Rochester, however, selected a 120-acre site on the Canaseraga Creek near a

small hamlet called Dansville and so situated that it assured control of the water-power rights on that tributary of the Genesee. He was chiefly interested in town development and saw an opportunity to promote a new one on the frontier. These, of course, were speculative ventures, and the three friends shortly returned to Maryland to rejoin their families.

They could not resist the urge to revisit their sites in 1801 and 1803. On the latter trip they journeyed farther north to see the falls of the Genesee. There the abandoned 100-acre tract at the small upper falls attracted their interest. Situated at the northern end of the Genesee trade route, where shipments down the river would have to be unloaded for the portage around the falls, and endowed with an abundant supply of water power, it seemed an ideal town site, well worth the \$17.50 per acre they paid for it.

Yet at the time these distant investments must have seemed marginal ventures to Colonel Rochester in the midst of his active responsibilities at Hagerstown. There he served, after 1803, successively as postmaster, as sheriff, and, a staunch Jeffersonian in politics, as an official elector in 1808 when he helped to cast the state's majority vote for President Madison. He assumed the direction of local street improvements made under a legislative authorization and served as commissioner of a lottery to raise £600 for the completion of St. John's Episcopal Church of which he was a vestryman. As president of the only bank in western Maryland, his influence and leadership in the community were assured, and many of his friends and neighbors must have been astonished and grieved late in 1809 to hear of his decision to move to the Genesee Country.

That decision was apparently motivated in large part by a desire to provide more ample opportunities for his growing family. The slump in foreign shipments produced by the Em-

bargo and Non-intercourse Acts has brought stagnation to costal settlements, and Hagerstown inevitably felt the blight. Many citizens looked increasingly to the west for an outlet. William B. Rochester, the colonel's oldest son, would be 21 in January 1810, and John C. would reach 18 a month later. Two daughters and a third son were in their teens, and four younger children were coming along. Their greatest opportunities lay in the development of new lands in the West or the North. But Colonel Rochester, who had seen evil associations engulf Robert Rochester, a nephew whom he had sent on a business venture to Kentucky at the age of 18, hoped to guard his sons against such misadventures by accompanying them to the Genesee himself.

The Migration to the Frontier

The caravan that headed north late in May 1810 was similar in many respects to others of the period. There were several large wagons loaded with provisions and household furnishings, a carriage for Mrs. Rochester and the younger children, and several saddle horses for Colonel Rochester and his older sons and daughters. They followed the Susquehanna road to its junction with the Williamson road, which took them by slow stages over the mountains to Painted Post. Finally, after three tiring weeks, the migrants reached the small hamlet of Dansville on June 10.

The Rochester family quickly became the leading citizens in that struggling settlement. On a visit the previous fall, the Colonel had engaged David Sholl to build a mill dam and race and to erect a sawmill on his property. Shortly after his arrival the next spring, he commenced the construction of a paper mill and inserted an advertisement for linen rags in the *Ontario Repository* at Canandaigua, the leading town in the Genesee

Country. He became chairman of a committee that solicited funds in 1811 to improve the navigation of the Canaseraga Creek and, with his sons and distant partners, Fitzhugh and Carroll, matched the pledge of the Pulteney estate for this venture. He equipped a blacksmith shop and offered it rent free for a year to any smith willing to settle in the community. He erected a stillhouse for his son William and a store for John and built several houses for sale or rent.

For several months he was too busy with these projects to give much attention to the 100-acre tract at the Genesee falls. He even wrote to Major Carroll, still in Maryland, offering to sell his interest in that venture in order to build up his holdings at Dansville. Fortunately Carroll persuaded him to hang on by engaging him to serve as agent for his two partners in its promotion.

Colonel Rochester rode down on several occasions to judge the prospects at the falls. He soon became impressed by the advantages there. The Embargo and Non-intercourse Acts, which had blighted trade down the Susquehanna valley, as well as along the coast, had exerted an opposite effect on shipments to Canada. Settlers throughout the valley, eager to send out some produce in order to make payments on their lands, were discovering the potentialities of the Genesee as a freight carrier.

The Colonel saw numerous rafts tied up above the rapids in the fall of 1810 and again the following spring. Some of the pioneers unloaded there and portaged their shipments over an old Indian trail to Tryon Town on Irondequoit Bay; others ran the rapids and portaged around the falls to Kings Landing on the lower Genesee or to Charlotte at its outlet. Only whiskey, potash, and salted meat could conveniently be transported over these obstacles, however, and Rochester observed that, for want of a sawmill, most of the logs of the discarded rafts were

tumbled over the falls to be lost in the vast expanse of the lake. Clearly the time was ripe for the planting of a new and promising settlement at the upper falls.

When Colonel Rochester rode down in the summer of 1811, he brought along his surveying instruments. A bridge was under construction to carry a newly chartered road from Pittsford across the river at the center of the 100-acre tract. He hastily extended its route westward as his principal street, naming it for Buffalo towards which it pointed. He laid out a second principal street, also six rods in width, running north and south a short distance west of the bridgehead. Following the gridiron pattern of the day, he charted several other streets, each four rods wide and intersecting the main streets at right angles.

Colonel Rochester's earlier experience in the development of Hillsborough, Hagerstown, and Dansville now proved useful. He set aside a one-acre plot west of his Four Corners for a future court house and reserved a smaller lot across the street for a church. He surveyed most of the rest of the hundred acres into quarter-acre lots, but set aside a tract for mill sites along the natural raceway and designated two double-size lots at the Four Corners for business blocks or taverns. He engaged Enos Stone, a recently arrived pioneer who had located on the east bank of the river, as his agent and empowered him to sell the smaller lots at \$30 to \$50 each, depending on the location, to any prospective settler who would agree to build on his lot within a year. He set a price of \$150 on the two larger lots and reserved the mill sites for the proprietors.

With watchful eye Colonel Rochester avoided a crucial mischance late in 1811. It was shortly after the completion of his survey of the 100-acre tract that he learned of a stoppage of work on the bridge. Hastening down the valley, he discovered that the road from Pittsford, originally intended to reach the

river at the bridge, had been diverted, after passing Oliver Culver's house, to hit the river just above the main falls. If continued on that route, it would place the vital crossing north of the 100-acre tract and at a point more advantageous to the Brown brothers who had acquired 200 acres on the west bank at the main falls. Whether the slight shift in direction was purely accidental, or the work of competing interests, was uncertain, but Colonel Rochester preferred to treat it impersonally in order to avoid open conflict with his new neighbors. A hastily drafted petition to the legislature produced a resolution that directed the road builders to turn the road at an appropriate point in order to make a proper approach to the bridge as originally located at the natural fording place. This action placed the main river crossing at the center of the 100-acre tract (it also explains the wide-angle junction of Main Street and East Avenue, which served for two decades as the road to Pittsford).

Several prospective buyers visited the falls that winter, but only three made firm contracts before May 1, 1812, when one of them, Hamlet Scrantom, arrived with his family to become the first permanent settlers on the 100-acre tract. The Scrantom family camped for a time in one of Enos Stone's shacks on the east bank while Hamlet helped to operate the latter's crude sawmill, cutting lumber to complete the bridge and to erect a house. On July 4th the Scrantom family moved into a newly completed log cabin built for Henry Skinner on his choice lot at the Four Corners.

The bright prospects at the falls were suddenly clouded by the outbreak of the War of 1812. News of that event reached the settlers in a brief article in the *Ontario Repository* late in June, and three months later a threat of active hostilities appeared at the mouth of the Genesee. Yet that danger quickly

passed, and the first impact of the war was to prompt settlers along the lake shore to move inland. Several of them located at the falls, to which the Colonel had now given his name.

The year 1812 was a busy one for Colonel Rochester and his family. Mary Eleanor, his second daughter, married Harvey Montgomery of Philadelphia in May, and four months later William, the eldest son, married Harriet Irwin. In the midst of these festivities, Colonel Rochester found time for occasional visits to the falls and brought Mrs. Rochester along on one such trip in September. Mrs. Scrantom, delighted by the opportunity to serve as hostess, bustled about preparing tea for her unexpected guests. But if the Colonel had planned to get his wife's consent for a move to the falls, nothing was said of the plan until the next August.

The announcement came in a canny advertisement in the *Ontario Repository*. There Colonel Rochester offered his properties at Dansville for sale, declaring his own intention to settle in Rochester at the falls of the Genesee. The advertisement served two purposes. It sought to induce a settler of means, who wished a safe interior seat, to buy the property at Dansville; at the same time it expressed the assurance of an experienced proprietor in the future of the more exposed settlement at the falls.

Meanwhile the war demanded increased attention. Several quick raids by the British along the Ontario shore, at Sodus and Pultneyville as well as at Charlotte, alerted the widely scattered settlers to the need for a more vigorous defense. Among those who enlisted were Colonel Rochester's older sons. William became an aide of General McClure and participated in the occupation of Fort Erie across the Niagara from Buffalo; John served as a captain in the 29th Regiment under Major Wool.

After their initial setbacks, the American forces enjoyed a

period of optimism and surged across the Niagara into Upper Canada. In their enthusiasm they pillaged York (Toronto) and other settlements, taking numerous captives, some of whom were billeted on the Rochester farm near Dansville. These depredations inflamed the Canadians to mount a counterattack, which brought the fall of Fort Niagara and the burning of Buffalo in December 1813. General Wadsworth wrote frantically to the aged Colonel Rochester, among others, calling all able-bodied men to rally to the support of his forces at Batavia. The village of Rochester became a depot for military supplies, and hundreds of militiamen passed through daily en route to their camps further west.

Fortunately the danger of a land invasion soon passed. Although a small British fleet stood offshore at Charlotte in May 1814, a show of force by the local militia discouraged any attempt to make a landing. Everybody rejoiced a few months later when news of peace arrived.

Some of the militiamen and other visitors, attracted by Rochester's advantages, bought lots in the village or on tracts east of the river. Among them were two substantial newcomers from Massachusetts—Josiah Bissell and Elisha Ely. Indeed, before Colonel Rochester could find a buyer for his Dansville properties, Bissell and Ely secured a lease of water-power rights from Fitzhugh and Carroll, then making a long-deferred third visit to the falls.

Doubtful of the need for more than one gristmill in the village, Colonel Rochester decided, after the sale of his Dansville properties for \$24,000 in 1815, to move his family to a commodious farmstead in Bloomfield. Situated on the state road a short distance west of Canandaigua and some twenty miles south of Rochester, it cut the time required for a visit to the falls to a day and afforded more agreeable opportunities to his

growing family. William had located in Bath, where he continued his earlier study of law and soon entered politics. Mary Eleanor had gone with her husband to live in Philadelphia, where the colonel's first grandchild was born, but in 1816 the Montgomerys moved to Rochester to become, with John, the first members of the clan to settle there.

Among other congenial and not too distant neighbors were the Carrolls and the Fitzhughs who came finally, in 1815 and 1816, respectively, to settle on their spacious estates in nearby Livingston County. Several of the younger Rochester children formed close friendships with the Fitzhughs and the Carrolls, but Sophie Eliza, the oldest daughter, met and married an enterprising merchant in Bloomfield, Jonathan Child, who had removed there when his store in Charlotte was threatened during the war.

Colonel Rochester found many other calls on his time. He became in 1816 a director of the Utica Bank's branch in Canandaigua; in some respects this was an unfortunate alliance, since it antagonized the leaders of the local Bank of Ontario. He was, however, again chosen an Elector that year and helped to cast the state's vote for James Monroe for President. He served as secretary of a canal convention, which met at Canandaigua in 1817 and petitioned Albany for a new survey to explore the possibility of building the canal along the route of the state road rather than through the unsettled tracts to the north. With lands on both routes, Colonel Rochester must have been chiefly interested in promoting forthright action. When news arrived of a decision in favor of the northern route, which would cross the river at Rochester and bisect his tract, the aged Colonel finally determined to settle permanently at the falls.

The town's surging growth called for astute leadership. Its ambitious residents petitioned for the creation of a new county

and for the incorporation of the village. Colonel Rochester was consulted on both moves, and with his son William now the Assemblyman from Bath, he presented both petitions to the legislature early in 1817. Although the first, opposed by delegates from Canandaigua and Batavia, whose jurisdictions would be reduced, failed to pass, the second was promptly granted. It incorporated the several west-side developments, encompassing 655 acres, into one village, giving it the name of Rochesterville. Although numerous east-siders could not be included, since they resided in Ontario County, the inhabitants of the newly incorporated town, in Genesee County, already numbered 700.

Flushed with excitement over their new status, the villagers promptly engaged in a spirited quarrel. When, amidst a heated discussion of the details of the state's voting restrictions, word leaked out that some merchants had prepared a list of candidates for trustees and other offices that excluded mechanics, as all workmen of the day were called, the indignation of the latter became outspoken. Some of them quickly drew up a separate slate, which successfully carried the election. Embittered by the outcome, several merchants threatened to "proscribe" the leading mechanics.

On hearing of the controversy, Colonel Rochester wrote hastily to Matthew Brown:

"I would rather have sacrificed \$500 than that such an event should have happened. . . . I have constantly endeavored to impress it on the inhabitants to harmonize among themselves as well as with the inhabitants of the neighboring village of Carthage [on the east bank] in order to make it all one place. . . I must entreat that you and Esquire Mastick will endeavor to heal the wound before it becomes an ulcer."

Although that controversy soon subsided, as the merchants abandoned their black list, other points of dissension arose trying even the Colonel's patience. He endeavored to treat the promoters of Carthage, headed by Elisha B. Strong, with equanimity and to cooperate with Elisha Johnson who laid out a rival millrace on the east bank at the upper falls. Disregarding the suspicions of Charles Carroll, he joined in the construction of a new dam to supply water for both the Johnson and the Rochester raceway. He entrusted that task to Johnson who raised it a few inches higher than the previous sluice dam. Both races benefited from the larger pool, but in November, when several days of heavy rain up the valley converted the Genesee into a rushing torrent, the low west-side properties suffered inundation. The flood waters carried off several small structures, damaged the gristmill of Ely and Bissell, and undermined the sawmill of John Rochester and Harvey Montgomery. Fortunately the bridge was saved and other losses proved less extensive than was feared.

News of the flood spread rapidly, stirring dissension that threatened more serious injury than that of the turbulent Genesee. Charles Carroll wrote from his estate up the valley blaming the flood's damage on the Johnson dam. "I have learnt enough of Yankees to dread and fear their wiles and offers," he advised the aged Colonel. "You are too honest and unsuspecting."

But Colonel Rochester was not easily perturbed. He endorsed a note of Elisha and Hervey Ely for \$20,000, enabling them to repair and expand the mill; indeed, in spite of the entreaties of his partners, he again assisted Johnson in reconstructing the dam. Renewed flood threats kept the issue alive, however, and when a suit by Ely and others against Johnson for damages was broadened to include Rochester and his partners among the defendants, the aged Colonel sent an indignant protest to

Hervey Ely. The latter replied with equal heat, and the extreme bitterness of the controversy was evident in the fact that both letters were postmarked Rochester. Apparently the two men, near neighbors in 1823, could not trust themselves to settle their differences face to face.

As Proprietor and Leading Citizen

Fortunately the intensity of that and other controversies of the mid-twenties was undreamed of in 1818 when Colonel Rochester removed his family to the falls. He left his farm at Bloomfield in charge of Jonathan Child who had married his eldest daughter, Sophia, that May. Catharine, the third daughter, met young Dr. Anson Colman shortly after the family settled in Rochester, and their marriage the next December provided an early social function. John, always the most restless, moved west to Missouri shortly after the Colonel's arrival, but the Montgomerys developed firm roots in Rochester. Thomas Hart, the third son, married Phebe Cuming, sister of the Episcopal clergyman, in 1822, and a year later Jonathan Child brought Sophia and their three babies to Rochester. William B. came to Rochester, too, in the mid-twenties; he was now a judge in the 8th Circuit and, because of the lengthy trips that office entailed, welcomed his younger brother, Henry, as a boarder and companion for his family.

Thus the Rochesters and their in-laws already comprised a sizable clan. When the aging Colonel invited its various members to a picnic at his homestead overlooking the river, some thirty persons of all ages gathered on the Fourth in 1824. These included a few collateral friends such as the Rev. Francis Cuming, but many villagers felt excluded and several of them organized a rival function the next year to which no Rochester was invited.

Signs of acrimony and jealousy were mounting, but meanwhile Colonel Rochester had several important functions to perform. Fortunately he was able to engender sufficient harmony to achieve them.

Possibly his most notable triumph was in the negotiations at Albany for the creation of Monroe County. Undismayed by their defeat in 1817, the Genesee settlements continued to press for an independent county. Although many residents up the valley wished to form a long county, with its seat at Avon, and many along the lake desired a similarly extended string of towns centering at Palmyra, Colonel Rochester had enough friends in both groups to persuade them to strike for three, not two, new counties. When the census of 1820 revealed that these districts together numbered some 68,000 inhabitants, as compared to only 53,000 in the reduced portions of Ontario and Genesee counties, the prospect for victory seemed bright, and Colonel Rochester hastened to Albany in January 1821 to direct the legislative battle.

The unruffled dignity with which Colonel Rochester directed that legislative contest won many friends at Albany. Even some Clintonians rallied to his support. His decision to name the county after President Monroe, who had recently toured the state, gratified his Jeffersonian friends. One wonders whether the aged Colonel took a secret personal satisfaction in honoring, too, the memory of that other James Monroe who had given him his first opportunities in the business world some 53 years before.

In his battle for the county, Colonel Rochester had enlisted the cooperation of Elisha B. Strong of Carthage who became first judge. Colonel Rochester became county clerk. Other appointments were divided among the leading petitioners, but many expressed resentment when Timothy Childs from Canan-

daigua, a friend of Strong's who had opposed the county bill, was named district attorney over the heads of several local aspirants. Colonel Rochester, however, was more concerned to see that the site, formerly set aside in his survey for a court house, be accepted for that purpose. Two rival sites were offered, but the central location of Rochester's site and its free grant to the county clinched its choice.

Colonel Rochester found time, while at Albany in behalf of the county, to press another bill for the establishment of a Lancasterian School Society. Although that effort, designed to develop a united central school for the village, failed of passage, Colonel Rochester's interest in education continued. He supported successive private schools where his younger daughters attended, and sent Henry E., his youngest son, off for a year or two to Geneva Academy.

Shortly after his arrival in 1818, Colonel Rochester helped to establish St. Luke's Episcopal Church. With his two partners he gave it a plot facing the lot reserved for the Court House, and he personally contributed \$200 in lumber for the construction of its first building in 1820. As its first warden, he took the lead, four years later, in the decision to erect a stone structure in order to match a similar undertaking by the Presbyterians across the street. But when that manifestation of denominational rivalry threatened a more serious rift in the community, Colonel Rochester persuaded his pastor, the Rev. Francis Cuming, to make a conciliatory call on the Rev. Joseph Penney, which opened the way for a new measure of accord.

Possibly the animosities engendered by several village quarrels were heightened by a crisis that confronted the proprietors in 1822 and 1823. The unexpected appearance of Seneca Allan, son of Ebenezer Allan, original owner of the 100-acre tract, placed all titles in jeopardy. His claim to the dower rights of his

aged mother, stirred a frantic effort to assemble the necessary evidence to counter that claim. The proprietors managed to keep the threat to their land titles secret, but the necessary negotiations with Robert Troup of the Pulteney estate, and the furtive inquiries among the remaining pioneers of the 1790's kept their nerves on edge. Luckily the claim evaporated with the death of Lucy Allan before her suit reached the courts, but the three proprietors were so shaken by the incident that they refused to assume any of the legal expenses incurred by the Pulteney and Ogden estates in preparing to clear the title.

No other effort unleashed such bitter jealousies as the chartering of the first Bank of Rochester. An early petition had rallied the support of all elements in 1815, but its rejection, partly through the influence of the Bank of Ontario, had contributed to the dissension born of politics and other rivalries. As the various factions emerged in the struggle for the control of the county, each made a separate bid for a bank. A group of Clintonians, with strong ties to Canandaigua, circulated a petition for the establishment of a branch of the Bank of Ontario in Rochester. Colonel Rochester's white hairs bristled at news of that action, and none of his friends supported the move. Instead, several of them drafted a new petition for the transfer of the branch of the Bank of Utica from Canandaigua to Rochester. Still a third effort to establish a branch of the Manhattan Company of New York made its appearance.

Colonel Rochester, elected as the first representative to the Assembly from Monroe County, saw the need for conciliation. He approved a move to link the two branch-bank petitions as one measure; however, when a Clintonian rider seemed to give an advantage to the Bank of Ontario, he relaxed all efforts to get the bill onto the floor. That measure died in committee, but Rochester cooperated with John Bowman, who succeeded him

as Assemblyman, in drafting a new bill for the creation of an independent bank in Rochester. They named a group of commissioners, with the Colonel as chairman, empowered to supervise the sale of stock and the selection of directors. Although that bill also failed to reach the floor, Bowman was again on hand to introduce it in 1824, and with the backing of Thurlow Weed, sent from Rochester as special agent to secure a local bank, it speedily passed.

All local factions had joined in that success, submerging but not forgetting their rivalries. Inevitably the organization of the bank brought their differences again to the fore. The commissioners, headed by Colonel Rochester, had only \$250,000 in stock to apportion among the eager applicants who had subscribed for \$1,500,000. Many names had to be passed by, and, amidst cries of favoritism, most subscriptions were drastically reduced. In an effort to maintain harmony, the aging founder accepted the presidency of the bank for the first year, but his private letters to trusted friends revealed the strain under which he labored. An outburst of hostility to the bank, fanned by disgruntled elements in the community, hastened his decision to step out in December. He had planned to have his son-in-law, Jonathan Child, succeed as president, and was grieved to see Dr. Levi Ward, Jr., elected instead. His disappointment was still greater when his arch enemy, Elisha B. Strong, succeeded to that post a year later.

Yet if Colonel Rochester's leadership was challenged in several respects, it was never entirely repudiated. Indeed, in the popular sense, he remained the town's first citizen. Thus he presided at the dinner in Christopher's Tavern on October 7, 1823, when the opening of the aqueduct was formally celebrated. He had previously turned the management of most of his estates over to his sons and sons-in-law, and one of the former,

William B., now a judge, delivered the speech of welcome for Rochester on the occasion of General Lafayette's visit early in 1825.

Younger men occupied the rostrum at the great celebration on the completion of the canal that October. Colonel Rochester nevertheless received an honored place on the platform, and his reflections on that event would have been worth hearing.

Like most of his fellow citizens, he was no doubt overwhelmed by the great development. The pear orchard he had set out only six years before had been uprooted to make way for a canal basin, and he had been forced to move from his spacious estate overlooking the river to a more modest house hastily enlarged on Spring Street. Most of the quarter-acre lots into which he had divided the 100-acre tract had long since been sold, and many of them had already been subdivided into three or more town lots. Colonel Rochester had bought out most of Major Carroll's holdings when that former partner had moved to Missouri a few years before; he had even bought up some of his former properties and had acquired new tracts to the south, the west, and across the river to the east, when the occasion warranted. He thoroughly enjoyed such transactions, especially when they involved plans for new promotions. And as he looked about the thriving village in the mid-twenties, he could feel truly gratified by the results of his handiwork.

Yet his work was not quite done. He had helped to organize the town's economy and to launch its civic affairs. He had laid the foundations for its social traditions and contributed to its political and cultural life. Although he had encountered opposition and endured criticism in each field, not always with equanimity, yet as a judicious proprietor he had generally kept his eye on the broader welfare of the community. He was ready now to recognize the modest limitations of one man's or one

family's role in its affairs. His greatest contribution had been the promotion of harmony between the many contending groups that participated in the growth of Rochester in this turbulent boom period.

Colonel Rochester's spirit, if not his advice, was evident in the decision of the leaders of the local Masonic lodges to surrender their charter in 1829. Not a Mason himself, the aging Colonel could not help deploring the ferocity of the attack on the numerous members of the order who were respected fellow citizens. He could not believe any of them had been responsible for the abduction of William Morgan, nor could he see the justice of charging them with guilt by association. Yet he rejoiced when his eldest son, Judge William B. Rochester, led the list of signers of the address adopted by ten local Masonic lodges when they publicly renounced their affiliation with the order that year.

Both Colonel Rochester and his son William had overcome their keen disappointment, three years before, when the latter suffered political defeat as a candidate for Governor. Yet the slight majority won in that contest by De Witt Clinton, riding the triumphal opening of the Erie Canal, was by no means humiliating. The aged Colonel was understandably gratified when he learned of William's selection by President Adams for a special mission to Panama and Guatemala. Apparently Henry Clay had a part in that appointment, and, of course, Colonel Rochester could never hear a mention of Clay without recalling the fair Lucretia, daughter of his former partner in Hagerstown, now the wife of the distinguished Secretary of State.

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that Colonel Rochester, after reflecting on these developments and on the many changes that had occurred in his lifetime, should have determined in

1828 to support the re-election of John Quincy Adams. He even ventured out of his retirement to issue an attack on Jackson that did not please some of his former Jeffersonian friends. Yet the reason he gave for his new political views show no sign of infirmity—approval of the support Adams had given to internal improvements and opposition to the effort to elect a man President solely because of his military renown.

Colonel Rochester must have been slightly amused on that occasion to find himself on the same platform with Timothy Childs and Elisha B. Strong. Yet he was never one to harbor grudges, and as in his youth he believed in living for the future, not the past. No doubt many of his fellow townsmen recognized this characteristic, for they called on him again in 1829 to perform one last community function. It was after several previous efforts to organize a Franklin Society, a debating group, and a library association had failed, because of a lack of cooperation, that a new effort to found the Rochester Athenaeum was launched combining representatives of all factions with Colonel Rochester as president. In this final demonstration of his leadership, the aged proprietor was probably for the first time only a figurehead—but it was a useful and admirable figurehead—standing for harmony and community well-being.

Already suffering from numerous infirmities, the Colonel made few appearances in his last two years. He took delight in the growing number and increasing stature of his grandchildren. A tally made at his 79th birthday on February 21, 1831, revealed that, out of 37 births to his six oldest sons and daughters, 28 grandchildren, ranging in age from 8 months to 18 years, had survived. All but John's four children were living in Rochester, though William Rochester Montgomery, the oldest, was off attending Geneva Academy. One wonders whether Harriet, William's oldest daughter, now ten, still held favor as

“the greatest beauty,” a plume awarded her on the first recorded local contest of that character at the Rochester family picnic six years before.

It was in any event a pleasant occasion, made so by many devoted friends determined to brighten the long hours of the venerable Colonel. Suffering a protracted and painful illness, he welcomed the end, which came finally on May 17, 1831. His fellow townsmen paused not to mourn but to honor him, for as the Rev. Henry J. Whitehouse, his new pastor, declared, “all tongues have something to say in his praise.” A quotation from Sir Christopher Wren’s epitaph was appropriately chiseled on his monument, which now stands in Mt. Hope Cemetery: *Si monumentum requiris circumspice* (if you would behold his monument, look about you).