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Sesquicentennial of Rochesterville

By BLAKE McKELVEY

The year 1817 was a turbulent and decisive one for Rochester. Not only did it see the incorporation of Rochesterville and the organization, after a spirited local controversy, of the first village government, but it also brought news from Albany of the state's decision to build the Erie Canal and to route it across the Genesee at Rochester. That plan assured the town's future and supplied an economic charter for the development of a thriving industrial city. If the full implications of these events were not immediately apparent, most of the pioneer settlers at the falls and numerous migrants from the east grasped the fact that Rochester was not to be just another frontier settlement. It had, indeed, unprecedented opportunities and, by the close of the year, would become America's first boom town.

Rochesterville Described

The hamlet at the Genesee Falls had in the mid-teens been only one of many crude settlements. Its chief attraction was still the beautiful cataract, which plunged 96 feet in a perpendicular drop into the vast gorge that offered travelers a dramatic foretaste of what they hoped to see at Niagara. Even after viewing the great Niagara, the Rev. Joshua Marsden had paused on his return journey in 1814 to ride north on horseback through the

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forest from Bloomfield to see the Genesee falls. There he found "a view so intermingling the beautiful with the sublime, that I considered it well worth the labor and pains" of the trip. He did not, however, forget his chief mission, which was "to dispense the precious gospel" among the inhabitants, and he concluded his account with a brief note on this point: "I preached a mile from these falls at a small chapel, or rather a school house, in the woods, to which we had to climb over the stumps of trees and logs, for the place was but recently settled."¹

Marsden and a dozen other travelers of this period who recorded their views had more flattering words of praise for Geneva, Canandaigua, Batavia, and several other thriving villages in western New York than for Rochester. In July 1816 for example one such traveler, a French naturalist skilled with the brush and the pencil, took the trouble not only to draw two fascinating views of the Genesee falls but also to make a suggestive sketch of the crude settlement above. It must have been a quiet day for the only inhabitant the French artist, Charles A. Lesueur, included in his sketch was a hog rooting in the foreground.²

Two months later, however, another traveler, found a more lively scene. After a weary journey on horseback through the forest, Lieutenant Francis Hall was surprised to discover "100 good houses" already standing in the clearing at the falls and to learn that lots were selling at "from \$500 to \$1000 a quarter acre." A British officer who was taking advantage of his tour of duty abroad to visit the western states and Canada, Lieutenant Hall was the first journalist to catch the mounting excitement at the falls:³

The whole village is as a summer hive, full of life, bustle and activity. Its site is grand: the Genesee rushes through it like an arrow, over a bed of limestone, and precipitates itself down three ledges of rock, of 93, 30, and 76 feet, within a distance of a mile and a half from the town. . . . The immediate vicinity of Rochester is still an unbroken forest, consisting of

oak, hickory, ash, beech, bass, elm, and walnut. . . . There are, however, a few wolves and bears still in the neighborhood. . . . The hogs have done good service in destroying the rattlesnakes, which are already becoming rare.

As further evidence of its future prospects Lieutenant Hall recorded a local boast that "one thousand families of settlers crossed Rochester bridge during the last summer." Whether that count was accurate or not, it reflected the increased flow of traffic and called for new improvements. Ashley Sampson, a later resident, graphically described the village as he found it early the next spring:⁴

On my first visit here in 1817, after traveling over some three miles of corduroy road, or causeway, laid with large logs, on the old road to Pittsford, now East Avenue, I came upon quite a cluster of neat-looking buildings mostly painted white, among the logs and stumps, surrounded on all sides by dense forests, many of the dwelling houses being without cellars or underpinings, and resting upon blocks of wood. The buildings bore evident marks of having been constructed in haste, which, as one of the citizens told me, had one advantage, viz.: the timber of which they were built was generally so green that they were pretty good fire-proof; thus avoiding the expense of insurance.

Travelers of course see little but the exterior facade of a town and experience only the life of its hotels and taverns, of which Rochester before 1817 did not have a very adequate supply. It was not until January that year that Azel and Russell Ensworth purchased the choice lot at the Four Corners; after removing the Scrantom log cabin to the rear to serve as a stable they erected the three-story Ensworth tavern on this site. The makeshift lodgings previously available in the modest dwellings of Enos Stone and Abelard Reynolds on opposite sides of the river had not inspired happy memories, and no traveler bothered to describe his Rochester accommodations until 1818 when another French artist, Jacques Milbert, who stopped overnight at the Ensworth Tavern, reported the service to be very satisfactory. Even here, within another year, several late travelers would consider themselves lucky to find space on the floor to spread

their tired frames.

Milbert's account, as translated many years later by R.W.G. Vail, afforded a graphic view of life in the turbulent village. After commenting on the settlement's rapid growth in six short years to a population of 2000, he devoted a few short paragraphs to the town before hastening to make his own drawing of the main falls:⁵

I stayed at the tavern where the public coaches stop which go from Rochester to Niagara Falls. I had occasion to notice that the drivers of the coaches, drawn by four and sometimes by six horses, took care, as soon as they stopped, to fasten the two foremost with a chain provided for that purpose and solily attached to a hitching post. This precaution protects the traveler from accidents which might take place from the running away of the horses and the precipitous departure of the conveyance, accidents which are frequent with us. These carriages are never overloaded with baggage. A single leather trunk fastened on behind the body of the coach is sufficient to contain all the packages. This is not surprising when we remember the comment at the beginning of this work on the slenderness of the portmanteau of the American traveler.

I was very well treated in this tavern. I ate, with several other travelers, at a table as delicately as it was correctly served. As in England, the forks are of steel and the spoons of silver. After dinner the cloth is removed and the table of well polished mahogany is covered with dessert which ordinarily consists of excellent native cheese, more or less ripe fruit, and berry preserves. It is at this point that the conversation becomes animated, inspired by the Madeira wine which circulates around the table in crystal flagons. Who would not be astonished at so much luxury and refinement in a city which boasts but a few years of existence?

A visitor who enjoyed a more intimate view was young Esther Maria Ward who spent a few days at the home of her married sister Siba (Mrs. Silas O. Smith) at Rochester in February 1817. She hastened to assure her parents in nearby Bergen of her safety and to request permission to make a longer stop at the home of Rochester's leading merchant:⁶

We on Friday had a pleasant party of about forty-five who came in at six and retired at eleven. . . . I have formed some very pleasant acquaintances since I have been here although

I have not been out at all. . . . It is very lively in Rochester at present and Mr. Smith thinks it will not be convenient with his business to visit Bergen this week, altho Siba wishes it very much. If my parents have no objection to my spending a fortnight or three weeks longer in Rochester I shall feel grateful for the indulgence.

Rochesterville Incorporated

Part of the excitement at Rochester in the early months of 1817 stemmed from the drive for its incorporation as a village. A campaign for the organization of a new county to include several towns from old Ontario and Genesee Counties was also stirring comment. Its advocates were busily collecting signatures from settlers in Gates and Brighton, the two towns bordering the river at the falls, and from nearby Pittsford, Penfield, and Henrietta on the east side and from Riga, Parma, and Ogden to the west. Open criticism of this drive, coming from Canandaigua and Batavia, the seats of Ontario and Genesee Counties respectively, added to the tension and prompted leaders at the falls to draft their petition for a village charter with care in order to avoid a confusion of the two issues.

Col. Rochester, who was still residing on his farm in Bloomfield, agreed to carry the two petitions to Albany that February. Although the move for a separate county was defeated, the request for a village charter was granted on March 21st. Rochesterville, as it was named in order to distinguish it from an earlier Rochester in Ulster County, was to be comprised of 655 acres situated on the west bank of the river and entirely within the borders of Genesee County. Its territory encompassed two settlements on that side at the main and the small upper falls and numbered some 700 inhabitants, but it failed to include another three or four hundred who had located on the east bank. That omission, by avoiding a challenge to Canandaigua, the leading settlement of the entire area, hastened the bill's passage and gave Rochester a territory that seemed adequate at least for a start.

Unfortunately Rochester's incorporation was marred by an unhappy but spirited village quarrel. The general rejoicing that greeted the news of the bill's passage stopped suddenly when the leading merchants prepared a slate of candidates excluding all mechanics. Some of the latter angrily rallied their fellows behind a ticket dominated by their own candidates, and in the election at the schoolhouse on May 5 the slate of the mechanics, as workmen were then called, carried the day. It was the turn of the merchants to feel indignant, and rumors soon spread that they were discharging mechanics responsible for the opposition. News of the untoward development soon reached Col. Rochester at his Bloomfield estate and prompted a letter full of sound advice to Dr. Matthew Brown:⁷

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 in order to make it all one place. . . . It will be pleasing to the enemies of Rochester, and you know she has a great number who envy her growing consequence. I would entreat that you and Esquire Mastick will endeavor to heal the wound before it becomes an ulcer.

Dr. Brown, leader of the group that was promoting the development at the Main Falls, adjoining Rochester's 100-acre tract on the north, was equally concerned by this early sign of friction within the community. After "expostulating and reasoning" with both sides and warning "they were making themselves and the Village ridiculous," he wrote to assure Col. Rochester that "after cooling and reflection they are on all sides willing to drop the whole business."⁸

Fortunately the successful slate of trustees was fairly representative. They included Daniel Mack, proprietor of the Mansion House, Rochester's second tavern; William Cobb, a blacksmith who soon established an axe and scythe factory; Jehiel Barnard, Rochester's first tailor; Evard Peck, a book dealer soon to become the publisher of Rochester's second weekly; and

Francis Brown, Dr. Brown's younger brother and business partner.

The Trustees held their first meeting on May 7 and elected Francis Brown as their president. They held their second meeting at his office overlooking Brown Square on the 20th and chose a clerk, a treasurer, and a pound master. They met for a third time on June 2 to consider a list of proposed By Laws. Some of these regulations graphically reflected the more urgent village problems. They acted for example to prohibit the cluttering of the streets with building materials and banned the racing of horses there. They prescribed fines against those who permitted hogs and cows to run at large and against those who threw dead animals into the streets. They ordered each householder to equip himself with a firebucket and to keep his chimneys and stove pipes clean. They banned hunting and the firing of guns within the village limits and bathing in the river except after dark. They required licenses for those wishing to sell liquor or to slaughter animals within the limits.

Several of these matters soon demanded further action. Under the first village charter the trustees had no power to raise money except as authorized by a vote of the inhabitants. When the pound master reported the need for a suitable pound in which to confine stray animals, and the clerk requested authorization to purchase a proper book for the village records, the Trustees decided to call a second town meeting in July at which a budget of \$350 to cover the expenditures for the first year was adopted. These funds permitted the lease and fencing of a lot on the outskirts for a pound and the lease of another lot near the bridge for a hay scales. The Trustees met in October to choose a list of men to serve as a volunteer fire company, but it was not until May of the second year that they felt compelled to appoint a village watch to maintain a night patrol during the spring months when many newcomers were arriving.

Rochester's future was more dependent in 1817 on decisions made at Albany and at other eastern centers of power than on those made in the struggling village itself. Some inhabitants were of course fully aware of this fact and eagerly endeavored to influence the outcome. They renewed their petitions for the formation of a separate county and began late in 1817 to rally support from neighboring settlements up the river and eastward along the lake until they were finally successful in 1821 in securing the formation not only of Monroe but of Livingston and Wayne counties as well. They petitioned the legislature for a bank charter and for an early decision on the location of the projected canal. Few however grasped the fact that this last decision would supply Rochester with its economic charter.

Economic Concerns

The choice of a Genesee crossing for the Erie Canal was more fateful for Rochester and for the entire state than anybody realized. The first survey in 1808 had tentatively routed it across the river between the main and small upper falls, but after the War of 1812 when the legislature began to debate action, new surveys were called for. Townsmen along the old state road met at Canandaigua in 1815 to urge that the canal be constructed through Geneva, Canandaigua, Avon, and Batavia rather than through the relatively unsettled wilderness farther north. Col. Rochester then resident at Bloomfield served as secretary at that meeting, which successfully promoted a survey that demonstrated the difficulties involved in chartering a route around and between the innumerable hills that obstructed the way. Not only would its winding course have greatly increased the length of the proposed canal but it would have so aggravated the problem of supplying it with sufficient water that its successful operation would have been endangered. A second survey of the northern route late in 1816 reaffirmed its advantages and prompted the legislature to pass a canal act on April 15, 1817,

leaving the final determination of the Genesee crossing to the engineers.

As it happened nature lent a hand in making that decision—nature and the enterprise of several early settlers. If the canal was to cross the river south of the upper falls the state would have to construct a dam to maintain a constant level at the designated location, and the canal engineers watched with keen interest the construction of a mill dam at Rochester that summer. Col. Rochester had extended a low weir dam out into the river in 1815 to channel a constant flow of water into his raceway on the west bank. He and his partners were considering a modest improvement to that structure in the spring of 1817 when Elisha Johnson, who had acquired a sizeable tract east of the river at this point, proposed that the two groups join forces to construct a mill dam across the river and assure both sides an ample supply of water power. Col. Rochester welcomed the opportunity to promote local cooperation, and residents on both sides gathered on the east bank for a celebration of the Fourth that July, which was highlighted by a number of blasts of powder placed along the route of the projected eastside raceway to loosen the rock for its construction. The dam, which was securely built by fitting stone braces into crevices cut into the river bed to hold a heavy face of logs in position, reached completion that fall raising the level of its pool some two feet above the normal bed of the river and thus assuring a steady flow for the east as well as the west side races.

All seemed bright until a series of heavy rain storms brought an unprecedented flood that November. Not only did the rushing waters carry away several small sheds and inundate other buildings erected in the lowlands on the west side, they also undermined the nearby Red Mill, built two years before by Hervey Ely and operated by Col. Rochester's son John, and for a time threatened the eastern end of the bridge as well. The

damage along the higher banks east of the river was slight, but a major portion of the dam was washed out by the force of this flood. Among those who hastened over to view the damage was a canal engineer who promptly advised his colleagues that if a fall flood could destroy such a well constructed mill dam, no state dam would be secure. The only safe and secure way to cross the Genesee, he maintained, was by an aqueduct, which would have to be built between the small upper falls and the main cataract. Thus its first river flood helped to bring the canal to Rochester and gave it its most impressive structure, the canal aqueduct, hailed on its completion in 1823 as one of the nine wonders of the world.

Rochester or at least the Rochester area had had an earlier claimant for that distinction in the suspension bridge thrown across the gorge three miles north of the main falls. The Carthage bridge was of course a potential challenge to Rochester for its bold promoters conceived it in 1817 as a means for locating the principal crossing at the lower falls where the arrival of the first steamboat that April gave promise of the development of a prosperous lake port. Col. Rochester, confident that the several settlements at the falls would ultimately merge into one thriving community, lent his encouragement to the Carthage venture. Like others who journeyed down to view this soaring structure on its completion a year later he must have marveled at the skill and daring of its builders who in erecting the arch had spliced logs together in a wide span that crosses the 400-foot gorge at a height of 250 feet above the river bed. Miss Frances Wright, the British suffragette who during her journey through western New York late that year climbed down part way into the gorge in order to get a better view of this "tremendous span" shuddered in horror to see how its massive beams seemed "to pulsate and strain in the vast stillness of the gorge."

Miss Wright's premonitions concerning the bridge were justi-

fied a few months later when it crashed of its own weight into the gorge—fortunately when no one was on or under it. Its fall removed Rochester's outspoken rival and brought the chastened promoters of this venture into the settlement at the upper falls. Most of them located on the eastern bank where they would continue their rivalry with Rochesterville until absorbed within the expanded boundaries of the new city of Rochester in 1834.

In order to harmonize these conflicting interests at the falls Col. Rochester determined in 1817 to settle, himself, at Rochesterville. Though delayed for a time by difficulties in disposing of his large farm in Bloomfield, he finally made the move in November and took up residence in a large house recently completed on the west side overlooking the river one block from the Four Corners. There he assumed the lead in rallying support for a new county, for a bank charter, and for other essential community institutions. He also lent his endorsement to a petition for a lighthouse to be built at the mouth of the river. Although his appeal to President Monroe in its behalf was not immediately granted, it probably helped to suggest a fitting name for the newly established County of Monroe in 1821 and influenced the federal government's decision to erect a lighthouse at Charlotte a year later. The struggle for a bank dragged on for another two years but finally in May brought the passage of a charter naming Col. Rochester as president of the Bank of Rochester.

That achievement was more a triumph of internal accommodation than of regional influence for the chief obstacle to the bank charter had been local rather than outside hostilities. The natural tension between rival promoters had been heightened in 1817 by the ravages of the flood that November. Several of the men whose property suffered damage joined a year later in a suit to recover their losses from Elisha Johnson, Col. Rochester and their partners who had joined forces in building the milldam.

This action did not come entirely as a surprise, for even before the flood had subsided Charles Carroll, one of the Colonel's partners, had written from his estate at Williamsburg up the valley warning Rochester not to permit the dam on its reconstruction "to be raised higher than it originally was when we sold the village lots. . . . Therefore let us without hesitation say at once, take down the dam to its original height."¹⁰

It was however too late to escape damages for the past flood. When Hervey Ely and others who suffered losses brought suit against Johnson and Seymour, the eastside proprietors, the Referees appointed by the court in Canandaigua persuaded the appellants to withdraw their charges and institute a new suit against all parties concerned in the construction of the dam, which brought Rochester and his partners into a litigation that exacerbated community relations for many years. A bitter exchange of letters between Col. Rochester and Hervey Ely in 1823, when as near neighbors they were unable to settle their differences in person, suggests the intensity of the controversy.¹¹

This unfortunate suit aggravated the differences that had already appeared among the earlier settlers at the falls. Nathaniel Rochester and his partners hailed from Maryland and Virginia and, with others from that area, were chiefly Episcopalians, while the majority of Rochester's early settlers hailed from northern New York and New England and adhered to the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches. The Presbyterians took the lead in erecting the first crude chapel early in 1817 and made it available to other sects when a visiting clergyman rode into town. Shortly after his arrival late that year Col. Rochester took steps to organize an Episcopal society and gave it a lot adjoining the schoolhouse on Fitzhugh Street. There, facing the Public Square, St. Luke's frame chapel was dedicated in 1820.

These differences which would later appear commonplace and even desirable were most disturbing at the time, for the

village pattern called for one dominant church, not two. It was at least partly for this reason that Charles Carroll, Rochester's partner and a Catholic, preferred not to settle at the falls. He was too fond of the Colonel's family to wish to support a rival church and watched with some trepidation when his son located at Rochester in 1820 and helped to launch a Catholic society. The elder Carroll minced no words in expressing his fears and suspicions of the New Englanders. "I have learnt enough of Yankees to dread and fear their wiles and offers," he wrote to Col. Rochester in November 1817. "You are too honest and unsuspecting—take heed my friend or they will be your ruin," he added.¹²

An additional example of local diversity was the move in 1817 to establish a second local weekly. The first, the *Rochester Gazette*, had made its appearance in 1816 when Col. Rochester persuaded A. G. Dauby a Jeffersonian editor in Utica to remove his paper to the falls. Although, in the absence of any copies prior to 1820, we cannot fully judge its columns, yet from its later issues and the prevailing customs we can conclude that the number of lines devoted to partisan issues must have been infinitesimal. Certainly that was true of the *Rochester Telegraph* when it finally appeared in July 1818. Established by Evard Peck with the backing of local Federalists as well as other Yankees, the only local items were half inch advertisements announcing the wares of new tradesmen and one brief editorial complimenting Dr. Brown for laying a corner-stone for a new mill to replace his original structure destroyed by a fire a few months before.

While copies of the *Rochester Gazette* of 1817 are missing, those of the *Ontario Repository* published in rival Canandaigua are available and add some interesting details. Peck ran an ad in that paper in April 1817 for his bookstore in Rochester, where he also had a supply of wallpaper. Backus and Grange inserted

an ad two months later for their drug store "near the bridge." And Elisha Johnson announced his readiness the next February to sell 200 village lots and 40 water rights on the east bank. On May 5, 1818, the *Repository* reported the losses at Dr. Brown's fire at \$17,000, a severe blow in the pioneer community.¹³

Although they remained somewhat aloof from the main controversies the Browns were among the most important of the pioneer settlers. They erected the first large stone mill and would hasten to replace it after its destruction by fire in 1818; the mill race they dug out along the brink of the gorge north westward from the main falls cost an estimated \$3868 for labor and supplies, and the itemized cost for this operation, rushed to completion late in 1816, supplied a useful guide to the engineers charged the next year with making preparations for digging the Erie Canal.¹⁴

Enterprising Villagers

But in commemorating the establishment of the village and in recalling the stirring events of that year, which saw the laying of the town's economic and institutional foundations, we must not fail to honor the enterprising settlers themselves. Many of the approximately 1000 pioneers who by 1817 had settled east and west of the river within the area of the present-day Rochester would soon move on, as restless Americans everywhere were doing, yet at least thirty of the approximately 200 families not only stayed put but also contributed significant leaders to the emerging community. And, despite the city's remarkable growth in succeeding years, during which it has attracted newcomers of talent from many parts of the country and abroad, some of these pioneer families still occupy a respected place in metropolitan Rochester.

The three families that share the honors generally accorded to first settlers were the Enos Stones who settled on the east bank in 1810, the Hamlet Scrantoms who located at the Four

Corners in 1812, and the Brown brothers who had arrived to take up residence at the brink of the main falls the year before. Several more pioneer families had already established settlements in other portions of present-day Rochester—the Kings and the Hanfords in the vicinity of Kodak Park, both before 1810; the Lattas at Charlotte near the mouth of the river; and the Oliver Culvers in the city's southeastern district. The latter two have contributed their names to important streets, and the numerous descendants of these four families, like those of the three most closely identified with the village, participated in community affairs. Indeed, Francis Brown who, as we have seen, was named chairman of the first village board, served in that capacity for several years, while the eldest of the Scrantom boys, Hamlet D., who arrived with his parents in 1812, grew up to become mayor of Rochester in 1860.

Six other families that had located at the falls in time to participate at the incorporation of the village also supplied successful candidates for mayor of Rochester in later years. Jonathan Child, son-in-law of Col. Rochester, who became the city's first mayor in 1834, was not one of the six for he did not settle at the village until 1820, yet he should be remembered as a pioneer for he kept store at Charlotte for several years after 1810 and after moving to Bloomfield, where he managed the Colonel's estate, maintained active interests in the lower Genesee settlements. In similar fashion, the Ward family, which did not take up residence at Rochester until 1818, was actively engaged in promoting its development from nearby Bergen and saw its eldest son, Levi A. Ward, elected mayor by the Whigs in 1849.

The pioneer families that produced mayors were evenly divided in party affiliations. Elisha Johnson, Rochester's fifth mayor and a Democrat, arrived with his family to take charge of the settlement he laid out on the east bank at the upper falls in 1817. A graduate of Williams College and an engineer, he

played a leading role in the construction of Rochester's transport facilities as well as in its civic life. Thomas H. Rochester, the sixth of the Colonel's eleven children, was the first to move to the falls in 1815. Although he left a few years later to seek his fortune in St. Louis, he soon returned and became, as a Whig, Rochester's sixth mayor in 1838. Samuel G. Andrews, who came to Rochester with his parents in 1815, was chosen the seventh mayor by the Whigs in 1839 and served again in 1856 this time for the Republicans who elected him two years later to Congress. Charles G. Hill, a miller from Connecticut who arrived in 1817, became foreman of fire company No. 1 in 1835 and ninth mayor of the city in 1842 when the Democrats captured control. Dr. John B. Elwood, another arrival of 1817, served as village treasurer and as postmaster for a time, besides practicing his profession, and won election by the Democrats as fourteenth mayor of Rochester in 1847. Joseph Field, who came to Rochester as a commission merchant from New York City in 1817 and engaged in various business activities, not only won praise at the close of his term as Rochester's fifteenth chief executive as perhaps "the most popular and most efficient mayor Rochester has had" but surprised many of his Democratic friends when at his death three decades later he left an estate valued at \$1,000,000, the largest yet recorded in the city.

There were, of course, many standards of accomplishment, and several of the village fathers of 1817 enjoyed successful careers that won in some cases as much respect as any of those elected mayor. Certainly no pioneer family has acquired more lasting distinction than the Reynolds family. Abelard had brought his wife and infant son to Rochester in 1813 and opened a small tavern near the Four Corners. There he soon secured appointment as postmaster and erected an arcade that became the focal center of business life in Rochester for many decades. His oldest son, William, and a second son, Mortimer, born at

Rochester in 1814, became leaders in real estate and cultural affairs and ultimately established the Reynolds Library which has become the nucleus of the reference division of the Public Library.

A dozen other pioneer families also merit our attention. Dr. Frederick F. Backus, for example, a graduate of Yale who settled at Rochester late in 1816, was a pioneer in health and welfare causes and became a state senator in the mid-forties. William Cobb, one of those elected to the first village board, had come to the falls in 1815 to manage an axe and scythe shop for Dr. Matthew Brown and soon had an edge tool shop of his own. Although his early death on a trip to the west cut short his career, the Cobb family was well established; a younger brother, Gideon, who drove an ox team for several months after his arrival, later became the proprietor of a brick yard east of the village and the promoter of other enterprises in the vicinity of Cobbs hill, which bears his name.

Several families prominent in village days later lost that position. Milling was a hazardous occupation as several of Rochester's leading millers discovered. Both Hervey Ely and William Campbell built beautiful mansions in the Classical-revival style after a couple of prosperous years but both suffered severe losses when a bumper crop pushed the price for flour far below what they had paid for wheat in the spring and their pillared mansions, the Ely-Osgood mansion on Livingston Park (now the DAR House), and the Campbell-Whittlesey house at the corner of Fitzhugh and Troup (now the headquarters of the Landmark Society), passed to other hands. Both men later recovered, but the Ely's had no children and the Campbells moved to Buffalo. Josiah Bissell, who arrived with the Ely's in 1814, was a vigorous leader in many village enterprises until early death cut his career short. His son, Josiah W. Bissell, left his mark on Rochester by giving the name and character to East Avenue

where his brownstone house set a pattern of spacious elegance that endured for a full century, but the lure of the west drew him away to St. Louis and other places.

Some village leaders practiced callings that did not encourage the development of deep roots. Thus Azel and Russell Ensworth, a father and son team, opened the Ensworth House at the Four Corners in 1816, but when stiff competition prompted them to replace it with the Eagle Hotel the onset of the depression of the 1830's brought foreclosure and spurred them to remove to Buffalo. Poor health prompted Enos Pomeroy, an attorney and one of the movers for the village charter, to pull up stakes and remove to the village of Wyoming in 1835. Elisha B. Strong, one of the leaders of the rival settlement at Charlotte who moved to Rochester in time to become first judge of the new county in 1821, had five sons and three daughters by his first wife, but after her death he removed to Detroit where his older sons had already migrated.

Some pioneer families developed firm ties by intermarriage. The Roswell Harts afford a good example. Not only did Charlotte the oldest daughter, who arrived with her parents in 1816, marry Rev. Francis Cuming the pastor of St. Luke's in 1831, but her sister Jane married Henry E. Rochester two years later, and Mary Elizabeth the third daughter married Mortimer F. Reynolds in 1839. The Rochester children established several family alliances—with the Jonathan Childs, the Harvey Montgomerys, the Anson Colmans, all drawn to the village by the Colonel's daughters, while Thomas H. married Phebe Elizabeth Cuming, sister of the clergyman in 1822, and Louisa L. became the second wife many years later of William Pitkin another village pioneer. In similar fashion Silas O. Smith, who settled at Hanford's landing in 1810 and at Rochester three years later, married Seba Hand Ward in 1816 and helped to draw the Ward family to the village at the falls.

Two pioneers who came to Rochester in 1816 and merit special mention were Seth C. Jones and Everard Peck. Jones was an enterprising millright who tried his hand at many lines, fitting out mills, building canal boats, operating a cotton mill, and ended by developing a machine shop that helped to foster several of Rochester's industries of the mid period. Peck who started with a book store soon ventured into printing and publishing and finally into banking. By his successive marriages to Chloe Porter, Susan Farley and Alice Bacon he linked three important Rochester families with his own and among other institutions helped to found the University of Rochester of which he became a trustee. His son William F. by his second wife was the leading historian of Rochester's mid years.

One of the most surprising aspects of the bustling village was the number of college men included among the pioneers. We have already noted Dr. Backus of Yale, Elisha Johnson of Williams, and Elisha B. Strong of Yale and Litchfield. We should not forget Moses Chapin who studied at Williams, Yale, and Litchfield before coming to Rochester in 1816; here he soon married Esther Maria Ward and eventually became a judge. We should also mention the Rev. Comfort Williams who graduated at Yale in 1808 and came to Rochester eight years later to become its first resident clergyman. Indeed there appeared to be so many able and enterprising men in Rochesterville in June 1817 that young Dr. William B. Collar, journeying westward in search of a likely place to hang his shingle, found it too crowded. It was, as he wrote his parents, "a delightful village, just above the Genesee Falls, surrounded by woods, many excellent buildings and places of great business, and rapidly increasing—but no place for me. There are eight physicians in the village, six more than it can support. I could procure nothing for my horse except oats and for them I had to pay six cents a quart—other things in proportion. Monday I rode on to Moscow" in Wyoming County where he located.¹⁵

¹Joshua Marsden, *The Narrative of a Mission to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick . . . with a Tour to Lake Ontario* (Plymouth-Dock, 1816), pp. 192-196, quoted at greater length in Rochester Historical Society *Publications* XVIII: 16-19.

²Robert W. G. Vail, "Rochester as Seen by a French Painter-Naturalist in 1816." In Rochester Historical Society *Publications* XIV: 311-314, see reproductions of these sketches in *Ibid.* XIV: 158; XVIII: frontispiece, and p. 28.

³Lieutenant Francis Hall, *Travelers in Canada and the U.S. in 1816 and 1817* (London, 1818), pp. 190-191.

⁴*Rochester Daily Union*, March 29, 1855.

⁵R.W.G. Vail, "A French Naturalist Visits Rochester," Rochester Historical Society *Publications* XI: 305-307.

⁶Esther Maria Ward to Mrs. Mehitabel Ward, Rochester, February 10, 1817, "Diaries and Letter of Esther Maria Ward Chapin: 1815-1823" Typescript. Rochester Public Library.

⁷Colonel Rochester to Dr. Brown, May 9, 1817, Blake McKelvey, *Rochester, The Water Power City: 1812-1845*, p. 58.

⁸Matthew Brown to Nathaniel Rochester, May 15, 1817, Rochester Historical Society *Publications*, XXI: 7-8.

⁹[Frances Wright] *Views of Society and manners in America* (New York, 1821), quoted in Rochester Historical Society *Publications* XVIII: 23-26.

¹⁰Charles Carroll to Col. Rochester, Williamsburg, November 9, 1817, quoted in Rochester Historical Society *Publications* XXI: 10-11.

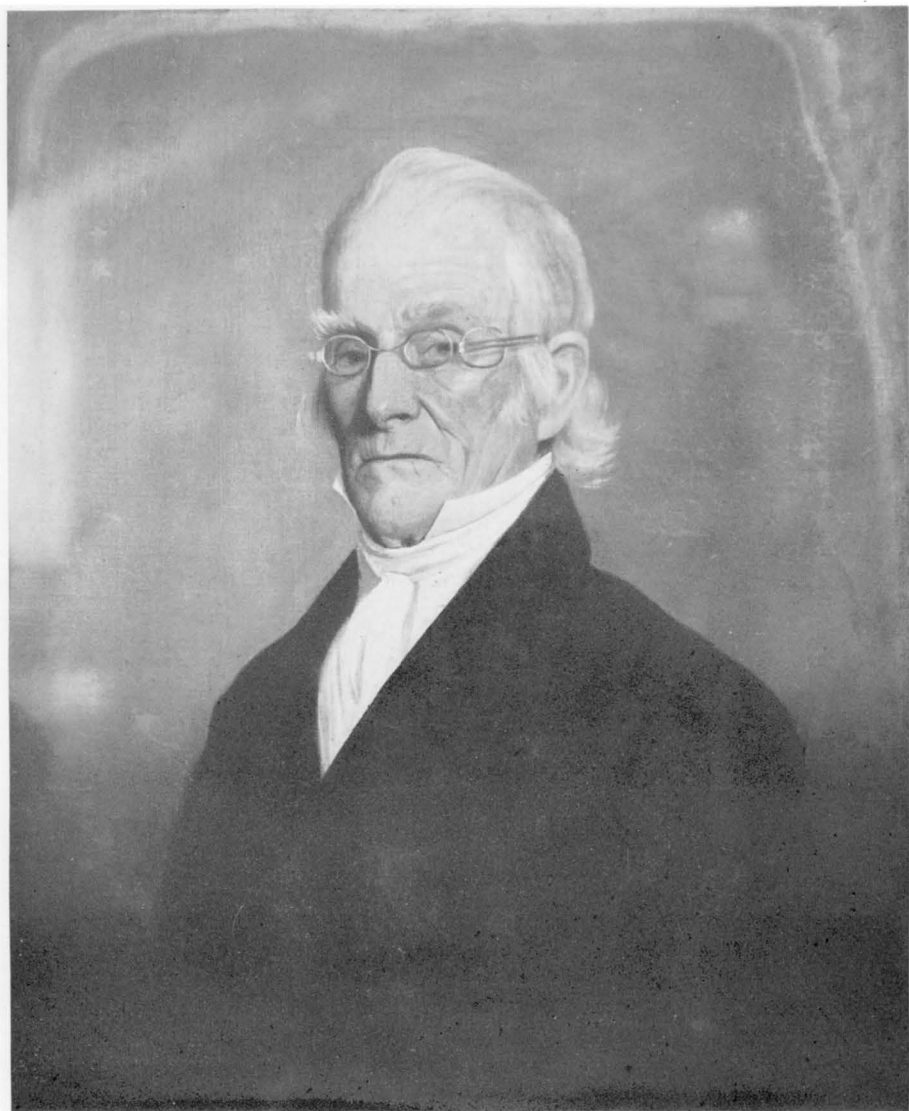
¹¹H. Ely to Col. Rochester, March 2, 1823, quoted in Rochester Historical Society *Publications* XXI: 17-19.

¹²Charles Carroll to Rochester, November 9, 1817, Rochester Historical Society *Publications*, XXI: 11.

¹³Ontario Repository, April 1, July 29, 1817; February 10, May 5, 1818.

¹⁴Matthew Brown to Myron Holley, Gates, January 1, 1817, Autograph letter, Rochester Public Library.

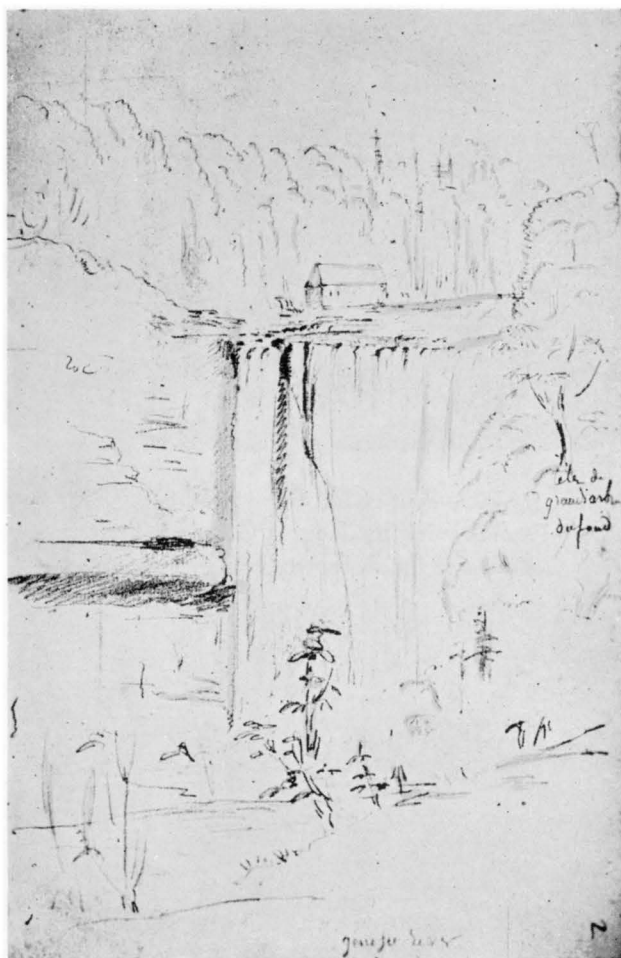
¹⁵William B. Collar to his parents, Wyoming, June 7, 1817, Autograph folder, Rochester Public Library.



Colonel Nathaniel Rochester
Oil portrait by John J. Audubon in Burlingham Collection, New York City



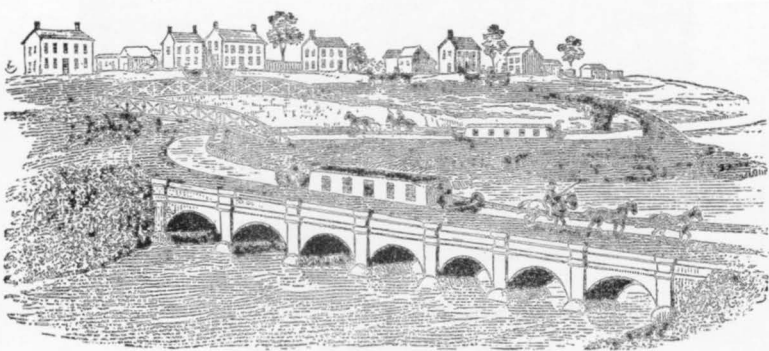
Charles A. Lesueur's sketch of the Village at the Genesee Falls—1816
It is probably the earliest first-hand view of Rochester. Courtesy of R.W.G. Vail



West Side View of the Main Falls
Drawing by Charles A. Lesueur
Courtesy of R.W.G. Vail



Main Falls of the Genesee—1818
From drawing by Jacques Gerard Milbert
Courtesy of the Rochester Historical Society



Preliminary Sketch of First Aqueduct—Woodcut printed by
Everard Peck, 1819. Only seven of the eleven arches are shown