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Traces of the Age of Homespun In Early Rochester

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Founded in 1812 as a milltown at the falls of the Genesee and quickly transformed by the Erie Canal into a thriving commercial and industrial city, Rochester was not a congenial place for homespun traditions. Yet its founders and original residents were all products of that earlier age and, despite their eager adoption of commercial and monetary goals, few of them could shake off the lingering traces of its heritage. In fact, during the first decade of village growth, Rochester retained many homespun qualities, and the discovery in the mid-twenties of the implications of its commercial and industrial roles came as quite a shock to most of its inhabitants.

Its Homespun Antecedents

Apparently none of Rochester's pioneer settlers hailed from any of the half-dozen leading American cities. A few are known to have resided briefly at Albany, the tenth city in size with 9,356 residents in 1810, and several besides Col. Rochester must have visited Baltimore and Philadelphia or Boston and New York before locating at Rochester, but as far as can be deter-

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mined all were of rural or small town origin and shared the homespun heritage. More familiar with the neighborly cooperation characteristic of village life, such as they had known at Hagerstown, Maryland (Col. Rochester's former residence), or at Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where the Reynolds, Strong, and several other pioneer families hailed from, the Rochester settlers were ready to celebrate the Fourth of July 1817 with a community picnic at which Elisha Johnson supplied powder to blast rocks and open his eastside raceway in honor of the occasion.

Rochester was not, like Canandaigua, Williamsburgh and Bath in the Genesee Country, or like many towns on the Ohio frontier, a promotion of speculative developers from the eastern cities or abroad. Col. Rochester, recently from Hagerstown and resident at Dansville, a small hamlet up the valley, laid out the 100-acre tract on the west bank of the river at the upper falls as a modest village in 1811 and offered quarter-acre lots for sale at \$50 each to any settler who would undertake to build a house on his lot within the first year. He engaged Enos Stone, a pioneer farmer who held title to 80 acres on the eastern bank, to serve as agent for the sale of lots in the village.⁸

Men of numerous and varied skills were in demand to help build the new town. Abelard Reynolds, for example, worked as a saddler in 1813, earning enough from military orders for the troops moving to the frontier that year to enable him to erect and furnish his house and tavern on Main Street near the bridge and to secure a designation as the first postmaster of Rochester.⁵ Gideon and William Cobb arrived with a yoke of oxen in 1814 and, after hauling freight to and from the dock below the lower falls for a season, helped the Brown brothers establish an axe and scythe factory at the main falls; William became chairman of the first village board in 1817 before moving west to Louisville, while Gideon soon established a brick yard east of the river. Equally versatile were the Ely brothers,

Elisha and Harvey, who arrived late in 1813 and not only opened a store at the Four Corners but also erected the red mill and became the first large importers of wheat. Alternately rich and poor, as fortune smiled or frowned, Harvey later built and lost two fine mansions and was the first in the mid-twenties to see the value of planting shade trees on Rochester's streets. Lacking a brother at the time of his arrival, Benjamin Campbell soon acquired one by marrying the sister of Azel Ensworth the leading tavern keeper; after a prosperous venture in merchandizing, he bought a mill on the island near the newly completed aqueduct and with his first season's profits built the handsome Greek Revival mansion, which is still standing as the Campbell-Whittlesey house on Troup Street.⁵

The versatility shown by the men was no less evident among their wives and sisters. Most of them, in fact, were too busy with household chores to leave a record of their activities, but fortunately Esther Maria Ward started keeping a diary as a school girl in 1815 and, after visiting her older sister Seba (Mrs. Silas O. Smith) in Rochester that fall, married Moses Chapin a young attorney recently graduated from Yale College. She celebrated her first wedding anniversary (shortly before her 21st birthday) by supervising the curing of hams for the winter season, and she marked the end of her second year of married life by tabulating her accomplishments during that period. In addition to keeping a large vegetable garden, with a corner for flowers, she had made 15 shirts, 3 corsets, 7 night caps, 8 night gowns, 3 petticoats, 10 slips, 6 gowns, 2 van dykes, 1 great coat, 1 vest, and one pair of pantalettes. During the occasional meetings of a quilting bee of 15 ladies she had finished one bed quilt. She had also found time that season to drive with her mother and younger brother by carriage to Marietta, Ohio, to visit her aunt. They made an average of 37 miles a day, she reported, and found that town a pleasant one but not as bustling

as Rochester, to which she was glad to return six weeks later.¹

The early household chores were so numerous and tiring that many wives sought to escape for a time by making periodic visits to their parents or other distant relatives. Catherine Rochester Colman, seventh child of Col. Rochester and wife of the village doctor, had no such excuse since most of her relatives lived nearby. But after her husband had journeyed to London and Paris to visit their hospitals, she secured his consent to take a trip by steamer to Montreal and Quebec and by stage through the eastern states to Baltimore. Left at home with his growing family, Dr. Colman found the multiple tasks of managing the household, ordering the food, supervising the children and the servants, so much of a burden in addition to the care of his patients that he firmly resolved never again to consent to the absence of his wife "unless necessary."⁶

The ingenuity and skills of Rochester's early residents accelerated its development. The aging proprietor, eager to speed the town's growth, built a saw mill which he rented to Lyman Wait on condition that he saw up the 218 logs that the Colonel had brought down the river that spring to supply lumber for new houses in town. He soon had lumber for a number of small houses which he enclosed and leased to newcomers who agreed to plaster and paint them. Payments in kind were common in the early village days as young men and women, relatives or the children of former neighbors, worked for their keep in the households of the leading residents or served as apprentices in their shops. Young Edwin Scranton, for example, third son of the town's first permanent settler, was apprenticed to A. G. Dauby, publisher of Rochester's first weekly, and shared the room adjoining his printing shop with another apprentice; he became a friend and admirer of Thomas Warrant the copper-smith whose shop stood next door on Exchange Street.³

In recalling many years later his early training as a printer's

devil, Edwin Scranton described the homespun method devised to spread ink over the lead forms. They used ink balls instead of rollers for this task. The balls were made from deerskin tacked to two handles and stuffed with wool. When the type forms were ready, the apprentices smeared these balls in ink and then beat the frames until all parts of the type were covered with ink. It was one of the most agreeable tasks in the trade, Edwin recalled, for the apprentice always beat to the tune of "Yankee Doodle" or some other song that supplied a pleasant and exhilarating interlude in the printer's more tedious tasks.³

Edwin Scranton's "Old Citizen Letters," the first of which appeared 50 years after his arrival as a lad at the undeveloped site of Rochester on May 1, 1812, supply many graphic details of village life. His account of the raising of the Red Mill in 1814 is a good example of that characteristic operation:

I distinctly remember the raising of the Red Mill, when every man and boy in the village, with a majority of the women, were present. That "raising" occupied the best part of two days. The southern bent and the next one were got up with much difficulty the first day, and many of the cross timbers and girders had been placed and pinned in to make it strong, and to form a support in the raising of the remaining two. To raise these with less trouble and strength, tackleblocks with ropes were fastened to the raised parts at the corners, then other blocks were rigged to the posts of the lying bent, and some manned the "fall" while others, with hands and with bars and handspikes, lifted the recumbent, heavy frame-work. The bent moved up, as "Yo, heave!" sounded systematically and at intervals from the "boss-workman."—A little way up and the great weight proved too heavy, and it would not budge an inch. "Every man and boy take hold!" shouted the boss; and all obeyed. "Now! now! yo heave" was the order. At that awful pull, I felt the bent sink on my shoulder as if coming down, and hurriedly jumped away from it. What was my astonishment to find that the tackle rope on that corner had broken, and but for a strong "skid" that some prudent men had put under the post, following the rising bent, the disaster would have been dreadful. As it was, one man, a Mr. Woodruff, received the

force of the fall, so that it injured his spine, producing paralysis, which a few months after proved fatal. A renewal of fresh forces afterwards completed that first great "raising" which was celebrated by a great jollification, prominent in which was the liberal distribution of cake made by those helping women and which was washed down by "black strap" and water, the latter of which was more sparingly used than the former.

A similar "bee" was held as late as 1824 when Erastus Granger gathered several dozen men and boys from neighboring shops to help raise the frame of the Farmer's Hotel on Main Street east of the river. With the town's rapid growth to 2,000 by that date, sharper competitive practices, introduced by the excitement of the building of the canal, had largely supplanted the cooperative customs of the homespun era, but the excitement of participating in a raising bee was still eagerly welcomed.

Many less dramatic forms of community cooperation also persisted. From the earliest settlement every householder kept a fire bucket at hand for use in case of an outbreak of fire in the town. With the incorporation of the village in 1817, one of the first ordinances required each resident to equip himself with one fire bucket for every two fire places and a ladder to reach the top of his house. To supplement these precautions, the trustees soon voted to purchase a hand pump "engine" and created a company of volunteers to man it. And the next spring to assure a speedier alarm the trustees named a village watch committee, each member to stand guard in his turn throughout the night. The volunteer system soon broke down, and the village raised \$80 to defray the cost of paying a night watch for the second winter, but the greater excitement enjoyed by the young men of the volunteer fire companies kept these bodies in existence for over half a century.⁹

Another early action of the village trustees was to create a pound and appoint a pound master to round up stray hogs and cattle and kept them off the public streets. This action, approved

by the second town meeting in July 1817, seemed necessary because of the general custom on the frontier of relying on hogs to dispose of household slops and on a family cow to supply milk. With the town's growth the practice of leading the family cow through the streets to an outlying pasture became objectionable, but John S. Wilson, whose reminiscences of the early days were read before the Rochester Historical Society on his 100th birthday in 1915, recalled that his daily chore as a lad in 1823 was to take his father's cow to the Howe pasture every morning. Most of the 2,400 cows owned by the 2,000 residents of Gates and Brighton, which included Rochester, in 1821 shared backyard stables with the town's 525 horses at least in winter months. The supply of food and bedding for these domestic animals was a constant concern in the village, and the Trustees early adopted an ordinance directing farmers who brought loads of hay or straw into town to stand with their wagons on the low strip of land near the bridge where, a few years later, the first public market was constructed.¹⁵

Rochester's position as a market town was enhanced by the presence of millers eager to secure wheat for grinding. Pressed by their competitors, several of them offered to pay cash for wheat, and that practice soon accustomed farmers to dispose of their grain for currency so that they could buy from merchants who now also began to demand payment in cash. But although Rochester's growth brought signs of change, many innovations had a homespun or agrarian quality. Thus Simon Pierson of LeRoy, who drove by sleigh to Rochester in 1816 to see the thriving village, recalled that visit many years later with pleasure. And curiously enough what interested him most was the handbill tacked over the mantle shelf of the Ensworth Tavern at the Four Corners; on the handbill was an advertisement of the

cast-iron plow recently invented by Jethro Wood of Cayuga; Pierson hastened to order one as soon as he reached home.⁵

Rochester's Ties With Its Hinterland

Rochester had from the start the potentialities of a commercial and industrial center. Many of its early settlers saw these larger possibilities, but they also recognized the town's dependence on the productive energies and cultural traditions of its regional hinterland. Rochester relied on the Genesee River not only as a source of power for its mills but also as its principal trade artery. The Genesee was not a deep river, and logging and rafting on its course required a hardihood and enterprise that only a homespun age could muster, and thus Rochester was held for over a decade in its grip.

We are indebted to Edwin P. Clapp for many graphic and descriptive details of logging and rafting on the Genesee before 1840. A long-time resident and storekeeper in the Town of Rush, Edwin Clapp began collecting the lore of rafting and boating on the Genesee in the 1890's when many of the hardy rivermen were still around and able to recall that early trade. These activities had commenced in 1810 when the Embargo and Non-Intercourse Acts checked shipments down the Susquehanna. Settlers on the upper Genesee and its tributaries, eager to develop new markets, hauled logs over the snow to the river and floated them over the upper Genesee falls to a large pool near Gardeau in present Livingston County. There they assembled into large rafts on which they loaded other produce for the long slow trip to the upper falls at Rochester. According to Clapp these craft were built on the pattern of other large rafts or arks that had been floated down the Susquehanna during the previous decade. As he described it:²

A framework or crib of heavy planks was laid down consisting of two strings of planks, one for each side of the raft. These planks were

lapped about two feet, and those at the head of the raft were laid first to prevent any planks catching on snags or the stones on the river bottom. Cross planks as long as the raft was wide were placed on top directly over the section where the ends of the side planks joined, the ends of the cross planks projecting a few inches beyond the side planks. Large holes were bored through these planks at the point where they joined and saplings large enough to fit snugly were passed from the bottom upwards. A head formed by the roots of the saplings, or grubs, as they were called by the raftsmen, prevented the grubs from drawing through when they were drawn up tight. The holes in the bottom planks were rimmed out to let the head of the grubs come even with the bottom and not project below to be caught on any obstruction. The vacant spaces between the cross planks were then carefully filled in with the other planks, and on this foundation the raft was built with alternating layers of planks laid lengthwise and crosswise. When the grub came in the way of any of the lumber which was laid crosswise a hole was bored and the grub passed through it. A tier of lumber was piled outside the grubs on either side to protect them and prevent them from being caught on any sharp projection. These tiers were held in place by the lumber piled crosswise which ran beyond the grubs far enough to hold them securely. The joints to the lumber laid lengthwise were broken to stiffen and strengthen the raft. After the last course was laid lengthwise, cross planks were laid at each set of grubs, and holes bored for the grubs which were then drawn up tight and securely wedged. That part of the grub which projected above the raft was quite convenient to take hold of when the raft was plunged into the water while running the shutes or aprons at the high dams. . . .

The raft or crib was generally built three or four feet in thickness (fourteen feet wide and eighty feet long). An oar was used at each end of the raft to keep it in the channel, and also to avoid the snags and the tops of trees which overhung the river and swept the rafts. A small cabin was generally built on the raft for the men to sleep in and for shelter in storms. The cooking was done on a stove in the center of one of the cribs. . . .

Shingles and sometimes potash were loaded making arks of them to all intents and purposes. The freight was unloaded before running the feeder dam at Rochester. . . .

The raftsmen and boatmen used the trees on the river bank for

snubbing posts to which they fastened the rafts and boats. The trees at the stopping places showed the marks of hard usage, the bark and even the wood often being cut in grooves by the ropes. It was a nice piece of work to bring a heavy boat or raft to a stop without an accident, and caused the men engaged much rapid and hard work, and not a little anxiety. When the water was at the right height to run the high feeder dam at Rochester, constructed in 1838, the current was quite strong and the short distance between the feeder dam and the dam at Court Street, below which gaped the upper falls, made the operation of running the shute dangerous both to the raftsmen and the raft. At some stages of the river very few were willing to take the responsibility.

It is related that at one time there were as many as forty or more cribs of lumber belonging to Amon Bronson tied above the dam ready to be run down. The late Benjamin Streeter, who had nearly always lived in Rochester, took the job no one else seemed willing to undertake and completed it without an accident of any kind. After running the dam a line was thrown ashore which was held by several men who let the rafts down to the lumber yards. The lumber yard of Hollister and Dyer was at Adams Street where the Erie roundhouse stands, and Mr. Bronson was just below it. . . .

In the dry spell between the rafting seasons in spring and fall some lumber men would "bullfrog" loose logs down the river. A heavy rain would facilitate this operation and permit farmers to sell lumber in slack periods when sometimes the prices were better. They also made use of the periods of low water to float shipments of staves to market. These were always in demand at Rochester where the coppers trimmed and shaped and fitted them into barrels to supply the needs of the flour millers and other shippers.

The making of staves was an important homespun handicraft throughout western New York. First the logs were sawed into blocks of the appropriate length and split into sections for convenient handling. Then, with a "frow" and maule, these sections were split into staves. This operation required skill, for after pounding the sharp cutting frow into the blocks with the

maule the block had to be inserted into a crotch at the correct angle so that the frow could be pressed and driven forward to cut the stave at an even thickness. With care and practice a useful product could be produced and sold at Rochester where some 500,000 were marketed annually in these years.

The successful operation of the big lumber rafts prompted merchants up the river to build and launch a number of shallow bottomed boats. Again Edwin Clapp provides a convenient account of this activity. He credits Abraham Hanford, a miller on Allan's Creek in Scottsville, with building the first boat, which he called the "Skimmer," to haul flour down to the rapids at Rochester in 1817. An old boatman described the Skimmer as "about 40 feet long and 10 feet wide" and able to carry 200 barrels when the river was calm. "She had no running boards but was poled from the bottom of the boat," he recalled.

A second boat launched at Geneseo at about the same time was called the "Shoveahead." It was used to carry potash and hoop poles to Rochester for use by the coopers or for transshipment to Canada. The success of these pioneer crafts prompted William Tone of Scottsville to build two boats; one the "Boxer" like its predecessors lacked running boards, but the second, named after its owner, was the largest on the river and had a well-constructed deck on which the boatmen could run from one end to the other with their poles as they pushed the boat swiftly ahead. Sixty feet long and twelve feet wide, it required a depth of 3 feet when fully loaded with 400 barrels of flour.

By the early 1820's as many as eight or ten boats were operating on the Genesee River south of Rochester. Among them were the "Independence" of Geneseo, the "Frolic," the "Black Bird," the "Olive Branch" and the "Ontario," which according to Clapp was sometimes called the "Old Black Snake" because it was painted black and was said to be the fastest on the River.

This river traffic had many advantages over that on the

pioneer roads, but rivers and streams were not everywhere available. Roads had to be opened and turnpikes built. The first stretch of turnpike was built from Albany west to Schenectady in 1797; it was only 16 miles long but it linked the river trade on the Mohawk west of Schenectady with that on the Hudson below Albany. Edwin Clapp vividly describes that early turnpike and its traffic:²

The roadbed was sixty feet wide and eighteen inches higher in the center than on the sides. The material used was broken stone. The freight traffic over the turnpike was immense and to meet the increased demands the freight wagons were made larger and more horses were used on them. From four to nine horses were used on a wagon and often four tons were taken at a load. The teams on the turnpike, it was said, "were continuous," and sometimes twenty were in sight at once. The flow of immigration was large; it is related that 1,200 sleighs passed through Albany in three days which were loaded with settlers and their household goods for the Genesee country and that in one year 1,200 emigrants passed westward over this route and settled beyond the Genesee River.

To entertain so many people the number of taverns were increased until they averaged one for each mile of road. . . . The large bar-rooms with their open fireplaces were utilized as sleeping rooms. In some, seats were placed around them under which were bunks containing beds. When the travelers and teamsters had warmed and rested and had eaten their supper they could raise their seat and find a comfortable bed to sleep on. This was considered quite luxurious and was the exception to the general rule, as the floor was commonly the bed on which the tired traveler, wrapt in his own blanket, slept. Often a teamster carried a mattress which he rolled up and carried on his wagon.

The wagons in common use as freighters were what were commonly known as the Pennsylvania wagon with canvas tops and from which the prairie schooner developed. Under their hind axle hung the bucket which contained the tar which was the common material used as a lubricant and also the pail which was used to water the horses. On the left side of the wagon was a tool box with a slanting lid which contained a curry comb, hammer, pincers, wrench and other articles necessary for a long

journey. . . .

A farmer going to Albany with produce would provide victuals for himself and grain for his horses. The charge for stabling with hay and a place to sleep would generally be 18 cents. The turnpike company soon learned that narrow tires were destructive to the roads and that six-inch tires were far better and even helped to level the roads and fill the ruts. To encourage the use of six-inch tires, wagons having them were passed over the road free and were not obliged to turn when meeting a wagon except it had a similar width of tire. . . .

In 1794 commissions were appointed to lay out a road from Utica to the Genesee River at Avon; before this the Indian trail was the only road. It was to take as straight a course as possible to the outlet of Cayuga lake thence to Canawagus (Avon). It was to be six rods wide and is now known as the old state road. It must have followed the Indian trail nearly all the way as it certainly did from Canandaigua to Avon. . . .

Stages began to run over this road September 30, 1797, at that time it was but slightly better than the Indian trail which it had supplanted. The first stage from Utica to Geneva reached its destination on the afternoon of the third day, the distance per day being less than 33 miles. Through the winter of '97 two stages a week ran between Albany and Canandaigua, one of which was a mail stage.

To protect the wagons and the sleighs which were carrying produce eastward a law was enacted in 1801, giving them the right of way over those going westward under the penalty of \$3.00. . . .

Before the Erie Canal was completed and between 1815 and 1822 a large amount of freighting was done over the old State road. An old resident of Avon, the late Frederick Pierson, remembered when the Pennsylvania wagons and horses were common and in long procession they were constantly passing back and forth from Buffalo to Albany. . . . The cost of transportation between New York and Buffalo was \$100 per ton. Of this amount \$2.80 per ton was paid for freight between New York and Albany, a distance of 150 miles, while the remaining distance of 360 miles cost \$97.20. The time required for the whole distance was generally twenty days, an average of 25½ miles per day.

A major task of the early settlers was to clear the forests and prepare the land for agriculture. But many tracts were far from

the river or its tributaries and the labor of hauling the logs out was too great. Instead they were hauled and rolled into piles and burned for their ashes. An early discovery that these ashes could be gathered and boiled down into potash gave rise to an important homespun industry. The first ashery in the Rochester area was erected at Tryon Town by Augustus Griswold in 1801. According to Edwin Clapp, Griswold paid a shilling (12½ cents) per bushel to settlers clearing their lands throughout the eastern half of Monroe County. From 600 bushels of ashes he could manufacture a ton of potash, which was worth \$300 at Montreal. Oliver Culver, who operated the ashery for a time in 1803, reported the shipment of 108 barrels of potash that year from the nearby Irondequoit landing. Only shallow boats could use that landing because of the sandbar at the mouth of Irondequoit Bay, but the boatmen carried their loads around into the river to be transhipped to lake vessels at the Genesee landing. John Maude, an English visitor to the Genesee in 1800, gives a first-hand description of life on the lower river at that time:⁷

Yesterday a schooner of forty tons sailed from hence for Kingston, in Upper Canada (about one hundred miles from the landing) laden with Potash, which had been sent from Canandaigua to Rundicut-bay, and from thence in boats to the Genesee Landing. No potash is made in this neighborhood for want of kettles. Indeed, many thousand acres of excellent Timber are annually burnt in the United States without any use being made of the ashes, for the Land is too rich to require them as tillage. Four hundred and fifty bushels of wood ashes make one ton of potash, a barrel of which weighs four hundred weight. An Albany sloop will take on board four hundred barrels, or eighty tons, worth thirty dollars a barrel, or two thousand seven hundred pounds sterling the cargo.

Boatbuilding was another method of "mining" the forests of western New York. Edwin Clapp, who described the construction of the river rafts, also tells about the builders of canal boats and lake ships:

With the construction of the Erie Canal in 1822, Oliver Culver built a packet. This was the first built as far west as Rochester and was the fourth packet built on the canal. Mr. Culver had had a previous experience in boat building for in 1811 he had built in Brighton a schooner of 47 tons, the *Clarissa*, which he drew to the bay with twenty-six yoke of oxen. He had also built three other schooners for the lake trade one of which descended the St. Lawrence; this schooner and the *Swanton* owned by Francis Charton were the first decked vessels to descend the St. Lawrence to Montreal.

The Genesee valley had a plenteous supply of the finest of oak timber which was the material used in the construction of sailing vessels and canal boats at that time. The business of boat building soon became an important industry and in 1838 there were six boat yards in Rochester. . . . The greater part of the outer planking used on these boats were sixty feet or over in length and very large timber was necessary to get the required length. The difficulty of getting these long heavy logs (often from quite a distance) to the mills [was great], and [since] the early saw mills [lacked] . . . carriages for such long timber the sawing of the planks for boats was done with whip saws. To do this the logs were raised on blocking sufficiently high for a man to work beneath them. Chalk lines were drawn on both the upper and lower sides. Two men, one on top and one below, did the sawing; this was not only hard labor but very slow indeed. The blocking had to be removed as it came in the way and a new one built up and placed behind the saw. As the demand increased for boat planks a few sawmills were constructed especially to saw boat planks and methods were introduced to draw the long and heavy logs from which they were sawed. To do this heavy sleighs were needed and sometimes six to eight horses were not able to draw a single log, and heavy tackle was necessary to move the log to a place where it could be loaded on the sleigh. Perhaps it was necessary to use the tackle again to draw the sleigh out from a place which the horses could not, and to a roadway where all the teams could be attached and move the load. This was a business which only a few followed and required considerable skill and tact as well as strong heavy teams accustomed in drawing together. . . .

The business of getting out ship timber continued through the fifties and in a few instances until after the close of the Civil War, in '65, when oak timber was got out in Rush and taken to the navy yard in

Brooklyn to be used in naval vessels. Since then iron and steel have taken the place of wood, and getting out ship timber has become a thing of the past. Much of the timber used in the boat and ship yards in eastern cities came from Rochester, and saw mills were as common then as they are rare at the present time.

Of course the most important product of western New York and the one of chief interest to Rochester was wheat. Again our Rush storekeeper-historian² gives us a graphic description of its early cultivation:

Wheat was grown at this time only by hard and tedious toil. The land was full of stumps, grubs and roots, not to mention the stone, none of which had been removed. The plowing was slow for only a few feet could be gone without meeting some obstruction and often the plow was drawn under the roots. Then the wooden plow had to be pulled back and a new start made. The wheat was sown by hand and covered with a brush or a three cornered drag. The reaping was done with a sickle because the cradle was not a handy tool to cut the heavy crop which grew among the stumps and grubs on the new and fertile soil; the threshing was done with a flail or by treading it out with horses or cattle, and cleaned by tossing it up in the wind or by a large fan. But under all these disadvantages and difficulties the wheat was grown. The Rochester millers now required a large amount of wheat and needed it badly when they could make their shipments in summer and fall. At this time the farmers were busy on their farms in clearing land, putting in their crops and harvesting them. Drawing their wheat long distances would take much time besides that required in threshing by the methods they had to follow.

One of the pioneers who was a resident of Chili tells of his experience in drawing wheat to Rochester as follows: At that time he was a boy of sixteen years. With two yoke of oxen and a load of thirty-two to thirty-five bushels of wheat the start would have been made at four in the morning. The distance as traveled now would have been less than twenty miles for the round trip, but to avoid the low lands of Black creek near the river a long detour had to be made . . . and the distance was increased to thirty-two miles. The latter course was far from a perfect road and was only taken because the shorter one was impassable.

Often with mud up to the oxen's knees and to the wagon hubs, over the corduroy and the roots, through deep mud holes and the small streams which were not often bridged, the journey was necessarily slow, and a little after noon the mill would be reached. The wheat would be unloaded, the cattle fed some hay which he had taken along, and his lunch eaten, a few purchases made and he would start for home.

Before the journey was ended it was generally dark and then beside his oxen he would flounder along the muddy roads and stumble over the grubs and small stumps with which the sides of all the roads at that time were lined, carefully trying to avoid the large stumps. It was generally about 10 o'clock when he arrived at home, tired and hungry. The experience happened not far from 1830, what might have happened before can be better imagined than described.

In spring and fall horses were not generally used on the roads coming to Rochester from the south, especially on the low lands of Henrietta, Brighton and Chili, but oxen from their ability to wallow in the bottomless mud or proceed at a snail's pace over the rough corduroy roads were substituted. When the roads were frozen and had become smooth or when the sleighing was good, long strings of teams brought in wheat and produce. In the town of Rush, quite a small town compared with the other towns of the county, were twelve taverns doing a good business from entertaining those who brought produce to Rochester. Some came from such a distance that two or three days were taken for a trip.

Homespun Traditions Outmoded

The building of the aqueduct and the opening of the Erie Canal transformed Rochester into a boom town where the homespun traditions were outmoded. An observer in 1820 could still see many traces of that earlier age. "I arrived here with unfavorable prejudices," declared "Hibernicus" (DeWitt Clinton, soon to be elected Governor) in a letter to the Rochester *Gazette* on January 2nd.

Knowing as I did the sudden growth of the place, I expected as a natural consequence that individuals were congregated here from every part of the United States with no other similarity in their views than a determination to make *money*. . . . But I have been agreeably disap-

pointed—the people are principally from New England and they appear to have brought with them the hospitality, the courtesy and the enterprise of that “much loved land.” No little foolish jealousies interrupt social intercourse or the harmony of the festive circle—nor has modern *Refinement* substituted cold heartless formality for confidence and good will.

The evening after I arrived there was a *Cotillion* party. I was invited . . . and never have I beheld a more brilliant assembly of ladies. Grace, dignity and affability shown resplendent from the faces of these “fair spirits.” Soon . . . the dance exhibited the female form moving light as zephyrs with grace and dignity in every motion. . . . The room was splendidly illuminated and fancifully decorated with evergreens. . . . I leave the village tomorrow, not without regret.

As more settlers crowded in, however, the atmosphere changed. So many newcomers arrived each year that strangers perpetually outnumbered familiar faces. As the 1500 residents of August 1820 increased to 5000 five years later, the editor of the fourth local weekly calculated on May 16, 1826, that 140 persons had arrived and 130 departed daily during the previous year and that “if the country adjacent continues to improve as fast as it has done for ten years past, by the year 1835 Rochester will have outstripped Albany.”

Rochester would not outstrip Albany, either in size or sophistication, for several more decades (not until 1880 in fact did its population match that of the expanding Capital). Indeed, many old residents, glad for the respite, agreed with the editor of the *Album* who declared on December 27, 1825:

Although Rochester is in point of business the first village in the state, we are too young to ape the fashions or merit the name of a city. Our streets are neither paved nor lighted, we have no markets, no shipping, no theatres or public gardens, no promenades for exquisites, and our alderman would experience a great scarcity of turtle.

Yet the demand for several of these urban facilities was so

great that when, four months later, the village trustees secured a new charter enlarging their power, the same editor remarked with satisfaction: "Heretofore, disorder has bid defiance to wholesome law, but the presumption now is that a new state of things will take place." A champion of homespun virtues, he applauded the Trustees in May for refusing to grant licenses for billard tables, nine pin alleys, and other forms of commercial entertainment, but he lamented their decision a month later to issue a license to Martin Frisch to exhibit "a caravan of live animals" in the village, and he protested vehemently when H. A. Williams, who now opened a theatre on Carroll [State] Street, claimed the right to stage performances of "How to Die for Love," "Othello," and other plays on Saturday evening as well as on other week day nights, despite the close approach of the Sabbath.

With the launching of Rochester's first daily newspaper in October 1826 and the publication of its first directory the next spring, Rochester's homespun days were passing. D. Sibley inserted an ad in the first issue of the daily offering a reward for the safe return of his stray cow, but more space was appropriated by the Rochester Hat Store, displaying a stovepipe hat, by J. C. Bond who was opening a dancing school, and by O. Wilder the local agent of the Aetna Fire Insurance Company, among a dozen other advertisers. Elisha Bissell, founder of the six-day stage line and the six-day packet company and leading backer of the Rochester *Observer*, which made a valiant stand against the worldly trends of the emerging city, was the last effective champion of homespun traditions, and that age closed at Rochester with his death in 1831.⁶

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