

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

Edited by BLAKE MCKELVEY, *City Historian*

---

---

VOL. 31

OCTOBER, 1969

No. 4

---

---

## From Stagecoach Taverns To Airline Motels

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

The opening by the American Airlines of the new Flagship Rochester in the city's Crossroads Redevelopment area recalls the fact that it was just 152 years ago that Daniel Mack, a stagecoach agent, opened on a portion of that site the Mansion House, the first structure built as a public house in newly incorporated Rochesterville. The traveling public, though more numerous and affluent today than ever before, represented in the 1810's and after a much larger portion of the total population. Practically everybody was journeying about in those settlement years, and travelers were constantly forced to seek over-night shelter. According to one chronicle, almost every other house on the principal highways welcomed paying guests, for many pioneers depended on this revenue to meet the annual payments on their land. With the extension of stage lines into western New York in the 1820's, more substantial stagecoach taverns made their appearance. They increased in number in succeeding decades, especially in the thriving towns, until rising urban standards in the 1850's brought more palatial hotels to supplant

---

ROCHESTER HISTORY, published quarterly by the Rochester Public Library, distributed free at the Library, by mail 50c per year. Address correspondence to City Historian, Rochester Public Library, 115 South Ave., Rochester, N. Y. 14604

them. Even the grand hotels, after a long but turbulent era, gave way in their turn to the tourist courts, roadside motels, and downtown inns of the motor age. Much of the life and character of each successive era of Rochester's history found expression in its public houses, which provided not only food and shelter but also entertainment and communication.

### **The Stagecoach Taverns**

Rochester was too far off the main route of the Genesee Turnpike, which was opened westward from the Mohawk Valley to the Niagara frontier in 1800, to attract any of the pioneer upstate taverns. When Timothy Bigelow recorded his tour to Niagara in 1805 he described the comfortable quarters he found at Powell's in Geneva and at Hosmer's in Avon where he breakfasted on mutton chops, waffles, preserved berries, bread and butter, coffee and cherry pie. Other travelers of that period stopped at Ganson's tavern in LeRoy, Vandeventer's tavern in Batavia, Taylor's Hotel in Canandaigua, or General Hall's in Bloomfield, but those who turned northward to see the Genesee falls found only limited accommodations at pioneer cottages.

Fortunately several travel journals described such visits. Louis Phillipe, who would later become King of France, stopped for refreshments at Orringh Stone's tavern en route to the falls in 1797, but the next year another French refugee, Count Colbert, missed that modest cottage (which is maintained today on present East Avenue by the Landmarks Society) and had to spend the night on a bunk in Allan's mill at the upper falls because the large family of Josiah Fish, then in charge of the mill, more than crowded his cabin. Two years later John Maude, a British traveler, found better accommodations in the substantial log house of Gideon King at the landing above the lower falls. Several more years slipped by before Oliver Culver erected

in 1805 the first portion of his tavern near the intersection of present day Culver Road and East Avenue. One of the Hanford brothers, who undertook in 1809 to revive the work at King's landing, built a frame tavern at that point to accommodate travelers arriving over the lake by schooner or along the Ridge Road from the west. Daniel Perrin who accommodated travelers through Pittsford for many seasons probably erected his tavern at the four corners there in 1810. It was in that year that Isaac Stone, brother of Orringh, erected the first tavern at the upper falls, but the most commodious feature of this modest structure on the east bank was its bar room. Five years later Abeland Reynolds was the first to supply similar accommodations west of the river in his frame house on the site of the presentday Reynolds Arcade. None of these pioneer structures could shelter more than two or three visitors at a time, however, and the first tavern of any size at Rochester was the Mansion House built in 1817 on the east side of Carroll [State] Street a few doors north of the Four Corners.

Daniel Mack, its first proprietor, soon sold out to John G. Christopher, a more vigorous manager who attracted so many guests that he determined in 1821 to build a three-story wing adjoining the original two-story structure, thus considerably expanding its facilities. With characteristic energy he announced in the *Rochester Telegraph* of Sept. 17, 1822:

### **Mansion House**

The subscriber renders his thanks to all those who have heretofore visited his House as guests. He has regretted extremely, that, owing to the smallness and inconvenience of his house, he has not been able to afford them more commodious accommodations. He has now the pleasure of informing his friends and the public in

general, that he has finished his new three-story building, adjoining his old stand, and that the two together form a very commodious and extensive establishment containing in a whole, 33 Sitting and Lodging Rooms, besides a very large and airy Dining Room. He can now accommodate Gentlemen with separate Rooms. He engages to keep a good Table, good Liquors, and good attendants; and that he will do all in his power to make his guests comfortable, and their situation agreeable. He has a large stable attached to his establishment. John G. Christopher. Rochester, September 9, 1822.

N. B. The above House is in Carroll Street, a few doors north of the stone store of Messrs. Hart and Saxton.

Christopher's Mansion House was, however no longer the only public house in Rochester. Lebbeus Elliot had opened a tavern on Buffalo [West Main] Street in 1818, the same year that Dr. Azel Ensworth purchased the old Scramton cabin at the Four Corners and moved it back to serve as a stable for a more commodious two-story tavern at that central location. Dr. Ensworth added a high attic to his tavern two years later to provide a public hall and concert room, and this facility prompted the formation of a band of musicians who led a parade through the village on the Fourth of July in 1820 to a community banquet in the Ensworth tavern. East of the river the Brighton hotel offered accommodations in the old Isaac Stone house, and a half mile north of the Four Corners the McCrackenville tavern opened at Brown Street, while three miles farther north and on the east bank the Steamboat House made its appearance at Carthage landing.

Frances Wright, later a famous British Suffragist, was favorably impressed during her first American tour in 1819 not only

by Rochester's rapid growth but also by the civility of its tavern keepers. Her comments, in a letter to "My Dear Friend," are revealing:

"The flourishing town of Rochester, thus strikingly situated, is seven years old,—that is to say, seven years ago, the planks of which its neat white houses are built, were growing in an unbroken forest. It now contains upwards of two hundred houses, well laid out in broad streets; shops, furnished with all the necessaries, and many that may be accounted the luxuries of life; several good inns, or taverns, as they are universally styled in these states. We were very well, and very civilly treated in one of them; but, indeed, I have never yet met with any incivility, though occasionally with that sort of indifference which foreigners, accustomed to the obsequiousness of European service, sometimes mistake for it. . . .

"On arriving at a tavern in this country, you excite no kind of sensation, come how you will. The master of the house bids you good day, and you walk in; breakfast, dinner, and supper, are prepared at stated times, to which you must generally contrive to accommodate. There are seldom more hands than enough to despatch the necessary work, you are not therefore beset by half a dozen menials, imagining your wants, before you know them yourself; make them known, however, and if they be rational, they are generally answered with tolerable readiness, and I have invariably found with perfect civility. One thing I must notice, that you are never any where charged for attendance."

James Stuart, who visited the area a dozen years later, added some masculine details on its early tavern customs:

“As to shaving, it is a very general practice for travelers to shave in public in the bar-rooms, where there is always a looking-glass. Males frequently wash close to the pump-wells, where there are basins placed on a wooden bench, a practice not uncommon in France. The people in this house [the hotel at Geneva] seem very attentive to every request; but you have no redress any where if the waiters forget or refuse to attend to requests considered unusual, and if they are Americans, and not of color, they will seldom receive money from a passenger, and so generally consider the offer as an insult, that it is not advisable to make it.”

Of course the pioneer taverns served residents as well as travelers. The first Monroe County Court held its organization meeting and conducted its 1821 Session in the public hall on the third floor of the Ensworth Tavern, but John Christopher at the Mansion House was not to be superseded. He had supplied the Fourth of July feast in 1819 and continued to provide facilities for community functions, particularly those involving a public banquet. The regular morning breakfast was hearty enough to attract local as well as visiting patrons, as Edward A. Talbot an English visitor testified in 1824:

“Rochester is situated on the banks of the Erie Canal; and although the spot on which the village stands was, ten years ago, a perfect wilderness, it now contains upwards of 5,000 inhabitants, and is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen. Although it boasts of no less than five extensive hotels, each of which is capable of accommodating between fifty and seventy persons, I could not procure a bed on the night of my arrival. Every public bed of the town was occupied, and I was compelled to sleep on a sofa. The next morning I

breakfasted at the Mansionhouse Hotel, in company with about 100 persons, of fashionable appearance and genteel address. The breakfast, as in Canada, consisted of a variety of meats, pies, cakes, tarts, &c. ; and as each individual finished his last cup, he rose from the table and walked out without any sort of ceremony."

When General LaFayette reached Rochester on June 7 in the course of his epochal tour of 1825 he stopped briefly on the veranda of the newly opened Clinton House adjoining the canal on Exchange Street to receive the town's official greetings, but he was soon taken by carriage on a tour of the village which ended at Christopher's Mansion House where Col. Rochester presided at a public banquet in his honor. Four months later the Mansion House provided the formal dinner for Governor Clinton on his triumphant journey officially opening the Erie Canal.

### **Flour City Hotels**

The opening of the Erie Canal brought a surge of growth to Rochester and called for the construction of several new hotels. It was not uncommon for travelers to discover, as Talbot recorded in 1824, that "every public bed in the town was occupied, and I was compelled to sleep on a sofa." The Ensworth Tavern at the Four Corners, with a horse trough in front to refresh thirsty stage horses, had the central location, but its limited facilities prompted the construction in 1828 of the Morton House nearby on Buffalo Street and of two additional hotels before the close of that booming year. The United States Hotel opened its doors two blocks farther west on Buffalo Street near the canal crossing, and the Rochester House took its stand south of the canal on Exchange Street. Three other taverns had recently appeared on the outskirts of town—the Farmer's Hotel on Main Street near Elm Street in 1824, the Bull's Head Tavern

at the western end of Buffalo Street in 1827, and the Green Tavern near the Steamboat House in Carthage; the first two accommodated farmers driving into town from the east and the west, while Green provided a terminus for the horse railroad that connected Rochester with its lake port.

These developments hastened the transformation of Rochester into a city. The first move for a city charter came in 1829 and although it was rebuffed at Albany, Dr. Ensworth determined to replace his old frame tavern with a more substantial four-story brick hotel. Abram M. Schermerhorn, who was destined a few years later to become Rochester's third mayor, acquired ownership of the Eagle Hotel before its completion and supervised the installation of new furnishings brought by canal boat from New York. Under the successive managements of Schermerhorn, H. H. Crane, K. H. Van Rensselaer, and several others, the Eagle Hotel maintained its position as Rochester's leading hotel for three full decades. The famous revivalist, Charles G. Finney made it his headquarters for several weeks in 1830 and two decades later Jenny Lind took rooms at the Eagle during her two-day engagement in Rochester.

The reputation of the Eagle Hotel was widely heralded. Thomas Hamilton, whose *Men and Manners in America* was published at Philadelphia in 1833, "strongly recommended [the Eagle Hotel] to all future travelers." Arriving on a hot day in July he was delighted by his reception. The hotel he declared, "was excellent and the luxury of cold baths and the civility of the landlord induced me to delay progress to the following day. In the cool of the evening I strolled out to see the falls of the Genesee (and to hear the story of Sam Patch, Rochester's famous acrobat)." Fanny Kemble, who as Mrs. Butler stopped at the same hotel two years later, had a somewhat similar experience:



“The inn at which we alighted was large and comfortable; in the drawing-room I found a very tolerable piano-forte, to which I instantly betook myself. By the time we had seen our bed-rooms, and ordered dinner, we found we should have leisure before it was ready, to walk to the falls of the Genesee, (the river on which Rochester stands,) which have some celebrity for their beauty. A man from the hotel volunteered to be our guide, and joined our party. We walked up the main street, which was crowded, and full of business. From this, presently turning off, we followed a wider road, with houses and pretty flower-gardens on each side, and reached, after half a mile’s walk, a meadow skirted by a deep ravine, through which the river [flows], from whence we looked immediately upon the falls.

“This spot is famous as the scene of the last exploit of a singular individual, known by the name of Sam Patch.”

Faced with this new competition, the older hotels adopted various devices to attract patrons. Sam Patch had occupied a room at the Mansion House before his fatal leap over the falls in Nov. 1829, and James Bourne who bought the tavern from Christopher two years later kept a caged bear as a conversation piece in the back yard. The device proved successful, for Mrs. Frances Trollope, who like every guest at the Mansion House before her in recent years had been conducted to Falls Field for a look at the spot from which Sam Patch had made his famous leap, was so intrigued by the bear that her many questions elicited the “information” that it had been a pet of Sam’s and had generally accompanied him in his spectacular leaps, all in fact except the last, and was now his sole survivor. This yarn, the first mention of Sam’s bear, found a place in her volume on

the *Domestic Manners of Americans* and in most subsequent travel journals by visitors to Rochester and thus helped to sustain the reputation of the Mansion House. When gutted by fire in 1844 its owner hastily rebuilt it for S. D. Walbridge who, however, shifted two years later to the more substantial Eagle Hotel to which he acquired title in 1852.

Rochester received its city charter in 1834 and most of its hotels continued to thrive even during the depression of the late thirties and in fact increased in number during the forties. The Rochester House on Exchange Street south of the canal was somewhat removed from the commercial bustle in the center of town and, as William Lyon MacKenzie observed, was generally "preferred by traveling families" many of whom arrived by canal boat from the east. The Clinton House also on Exchange Street but north of the canal had been remodeled after a fire in 1829 and, with its large bar and dining room in the basement, was a favorite resort for boat captains some of whom spent the long winter months in its upper rooms. A collection of trophies and "nick-nacks" in one window tempted the curiosity of passersby. Although the United States Hotel on Buffalo Street failed to attract the canal trade, it found a new function with the opening of the Rochester & Tonawanda Railroad in 1837. That first steam line butted on Buffalo Street adjoining the hotel, which became in effect its depot and served its early travelers until 1844 when the main line was extended into the Auburn & Rochester depot on Mill Street. That action prompted the conversion of the United States Hotel into a temperance house, which however failed to sustain it, and the property was sold in 1850 to the new University of Rochester and became as a result the birthplace of that institution and also of its twin, the Rochester Theological Seminary.

The construction of Rochester's first railroad station on Mill

Street in 1843 created a new demand for hotel accommodations in that area. The American House at the corner of State and Mumford and the Jefferson House on Brown Street appeared in response to this demand the next year when Rochester already had 42 hotels and taverns. Most of them were small and served as resident hotels to accommodate newcomers who had not yet found a home. The O'Maley House with four others on St. Paul Street sheltered many Irish families in the district, popularly known as Dublin; the German House on Water Street and the nearby York House, as well as the Caledonia House on Sophia Street, served other immigrant groups; while the Blossom House on Main Street, the Tremont House on State Street, and the Morton House on Buffalo Street each offered family rates by the week or the month, and the last two advertised themselves as temperance houses. The old McCrackenville tavern, renamed the North America Hotel, at the corner of State and Brown Streets, and the Farmer's Hotel on Main Street continued to serve farmers and hucksterers who brought loads of produce into town, as the Bull's Head tavern did on the west side and the Wolcott tavern near Mt. Hope on the south side. The Farmer's Hotel under the management of Charles Weston in the fifties charged 25c a meal and 75c for a night's lodging.

Several of these early taverns were of frame construction and all were dangerous fire traps. Numerous conflagrations occurred, ten during the 1840's, though only one produced any fatalities. In addition to the fires at the Clinton House in 1829 and at the Mansion House in 1844, both noted above, the United States Hotel suffered a fire in 1842 and the Waverly House another in 1849, but the most disastrous was that which broke out in the Rochester House on April 29, 1853, in which four persons lost their lives. The wonder was that more fires did not occur for each first-class room had its own Franklin stove and

the battery of flues ascending through the upper stories presented serious hazards to their inhabitants. A chimney fire at the Eagle Hotel was quickly extinguished in 1843, as was a fire of incendiary origin in the Blossom House stables, but the blaze that erupted in that lavishly furnished four-story structure on the 21st of January 1854 was quickly whipped into a raging inferno by a fierce wind, forcing its patrons to flee into a blinding snow storm that stymied the best efforts of the city's twelve volunteer fire companies and reduced the entire block to ashes.

Next to the Eagle Hotel, the Morton House at Buffalo and Fitzhugh Streets, renamed the National Hotel in 1855, and the Blossom House on Main Street across the river were the principal hotels of the late forties and early fifties. The Waverly Hotel opened on State Street at the railroad crossing in 1848 had many fine features but most travelers, preferring quarters more distant from the wood-burning engines, headed for the business center two blocks farther south. Several of Rochester's outlying hotels had already seen their best days. The Rochester House was demolished after its fire in 1853 and the Blossom House met the same fate a few months later. The Bull's Head tavern was remodeled as a water cure establishment and named Halsted Hall in 1855, but it failed to attract the patronage enjoyed by the Spring House, an old canal tavern on Monroe Street on Rochester's southeast side. Only the Eagle Hotel maintained its former high standards into the 1860's, but it lost its rank as Rochester's principal hotel to the Osburn House erected at Main and St. Paul Streets in 1857—the first of a series of sumptuous hotels that would characterize Rochester's mid years.

### **The Era of Plush Hotels**

New technological improvements and a new corporate enterprise combined to equip the expanding city with more adequate

hotels after the mid-fifties. Urban growth forced the relocation of some hotels and created new functions for their larger and grander successors, which played more diversified roles in the community's economy. Indeed their increasing activity continued for a full half century to animate the life of Rochester until checked by the congestion and diffusion of the motor age.

Nehemiah Osburn, who took the lead in organizing a company of east-side gentlemen to back the construction of the Osburn House after the disastrous fire of 1854, was a former carpenter who had become one of Rochester's most successful builders. He constructed his new five-story hotel of brick with stone trim. He divided the first floor into stores flanking the hotel entrances on Main and St. Paul Streets. The hotel entrances led up to the hotel reception hall and offices on the second floor where the bar and a commodious dining room accommodated 300 guests. The floors above numbered 150 sleeping rooms, each equipped with gas lights and water closets and warmed by steam heat from a basement furnace. When S. T. Cozzens an experienced hotel keeper arrived from New York to open it in July 1857, one admiring visitor praised it as surpassing any hotel west of New York City except the new Delevan House in Albany. A decade later when the Bromley brothers, sons of a chair manufacturer, acquired a ten-year lease to the Osburn House they completely refurnished it, carpeting the floors with Brussels carpet, equipping the beds with spiral springs and hair mattresses, and installed a newly invented hydraulic clothes washer in the basement to assure a continuous supply of clean linens. A new boiler and new steam pipes added to the comfort of the hostelry which was now declared to rival any in the state.

Unable to match such improvements, the Eagle Hotel had closed its doors early in 1863. Edwin Scrantom, who as a lad had been a member of the first family resident on that site a

half century before, served as the auctioneer to dispose of the furnishings, thus clearing the building for Daniel Powers who remodeled it as an office building by constructing his Powers Block as a cast-iron shell around the old brick structure and gradually replacing its interior with new floors and walls without discontinuing the banking and other office functions. That operation, which continued for several years, set a new standard for downtown construction and, when completed and equipped with the Powers Art Gallery on the fifth floor, provided a new urban attraction that drew visitors to Rochester and spurred the construction of new hotels.

Of the new hotels two were outstanding. The first was the four-story Brachett House facing the newly expanded depot on Mill Street. Built of brick and described at its opening in 1865 as fire proof, it was handsomely fitted and quickly secured preference among the half-dozen hotels that now surrounded the railroad station. Main and Buffalo Streets still commanded precedence, however, and when A. G. Whitcomb's lease on the National Hotel expired in 1872 he secured backing from several eastsiders to build a new hotel on Main Street diagonally across from the Osburn Hotel. Named the New England House, it attracted so many patrons that its enterprising manager added the third and fourth floors in 1878 and renamed it the Whitcomb House. Although Alonzo Whitcomb, who served the community at various times as alderman and supervisor, died in 1880, his widow carried on and, with her son-in-law James Downes as partner, acquired the adjoining property at the corner of Main and Clinton a decade later, practically doubling the hotel's capacity.

Daniel W. Powers, who had successively added a 6th, 7th, and 8th floor to his mammoth block at the Four Corners in order to maintain top place on the Rochester skyline in the seventies,

was disturbed by the eastward migration of the city's hotel and retail interests. The old National Hotel had lost its early charm, and Powers took the lead in organizing a company of westsiders, including Samuel Wilder, Patrick Barry, George Ellwanger and Mortimer F. Reynolds, all with major investments near the Four Corners, who purchased the National and adjoining properties in 1881 and launched the construction of a new 7-story hotel. Designed by A. J. Warner, the city's leading architect who had also built the Powers Block, the Powers Hotel, the largest building yet erected in Rochester, was finally completed in April 1883 at a cost of a half million dollars. It was equipped with two elevators and boasted in addition to 300 sleeping rooms, four dining rooms, three reception rooms, a bridal suite, ten stores, and a marble staircase leading to a banquet hall able to seat 500 guests. Built in accordance with the latest fire-proof construction techniques, it was described as the safest and most palatial hotel in America.

The opening of the Powers Hotel brought a reshuffling of Rochester's hotel facilities. Messers. Buck & Sanger, who had held the lease on the Osburn House for several years, took a five-year lease on the Powers Hotel and surrendered their Osburn rights to the Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Store, which had been eager to add that space to the adjoining store. Osburn invested his returns from this deal in a New Osburn House on South St. Paul (South Avenue) overlooking the Erie Canal Aqueduct. Shortly after its opening the old Clinton Hotel across the river on Exchange Street finally closed its doors early in 1887, but a new 6-story Livingston Hotel on a narrow lot on the opposite side of Exchange Street took its place a year later. The former owner of the National Hotel on the Powers site had meanwhile completed the renovation of a warehouse across the street at Buffalo and Plymouth into a 50-room hotel that became the

new National Hotel.

While these developments were occurring along the Main Street axis, the relocation of the station of the New York Central from Mill Street to St. Paul Street brought a shift of hotel interests from the west to the east side. The Brachett House and the Waverly Hotel lost their favored position but managed to survive, while several lesser hotels in the old depot area were transformed to industrial uses. East of the river Levi Bachman opened the Genesee Park Hotel overlooking the gorge in 1884, and two years later the Atlantic Hotel appeared across the tracks on North St. Paul Street, each eager to serve as the new station hotel. But the practice of the Powers and the other Main Street hotels in despatching commodious stages to meet incoming trains undercut the advantage of nearby hotels, and both the Atlantic and the Genesee Park Hotel closed within a decade.

The formation of a Hotelmen's Association for New York State and the selection of Rochester as the site for its first convention in July 1888 highlighted the city's potentialities as a convention city. The Association established a pattern followed by numerous other conventions by saving one afternoon for a visit to the Powers Art Gallery and one evening for a visit to the Warner Observatory on East Avenue. It also made a trip to Charlotte for a view of the lake and to dine at the newly remodeled Bartholomay Cottage Hotel at that resort. Among the state and national conventions of trade associations that met at Rochester in the late eighties, with their headquarters at the Powers or the New Osburn, were the sheep breeders and wool growers, the stonemasons, the beekeepers, and the undertakers. Their gratification over the opportunities for relaxation in and around the city brought other conventions to Rochester in succeeding years.

Few developments occurred in Rochester's hotels during the



nineties. Several new resort hotels appeared on the lake and the bay, but they chiefly served picnickers and diners rather than overnight guests. New social functions commanded attention in the major downtown hotels, too, and the remodeling of one corner of the main floor of the Powers Hotel as a cafe provided an elegant new facility and stimulated the development of new evening festivities. The Powers banquet hall on the second floor was frequently in demand for annual balls staged by local societies, while its two small dining rooms as well as three parlors, also accommodated various groups on special occasions.

As Rochester's growth passed the 175,000 mark in the early 1900's the need for new hotel facilities became apparent. Several rival projects were proposed in 1905. Smith Eggleston, proprietor of the Eggleston Hotel on East Main, favored one on Clinton North or South to spur the eastern expansion of the business district. Walter B. Duffy took the lead among the west-side merchants in proposing a new hotel on that side. Still another group favored a hotel on lower East Avenue. These rival projects threatened to cancel each other, and in the meantime the Powers Hotel remodeled the office rooms on its top floor as bedrooms and opened a hallway into the adjoining Powers Block to accommodate its overflow. It soon became clear, however, that this and other improvements would not satisfy Rochester's needs, and definite plans for two new hotels were announced early in 1907.

Construction of the Seneca Hotel on the east side of South Clinton adjoining the Lyceum Theater commenced in March 1907. Built of brick, eight stories in height, it had a spacious lobby with a commodious ballroom and other facilities rivaling those of the Powers, and each of its 300 rooms was fitted "with bath", thus achieving a new degree of excellence throughout. Special club rooms and parlors off the second floor balcony

overlooking the lobby supplied attractive facilities for convention use and convenient accommodations for luncheon and dinner meetings of various local societies.

Although not quite as large as the Seneca Hotel, the Rochester Hotel, built by Walter Duffy and his west-side associates, was furnished with a similar elegance. In order to provide 300 rooms (also "with bath") on the site previously occupied by the new National Hotel, it soared to ten stories. James P. B. Duffy presided in place of his aged father at its dedication on August 12, 1908, when over 25,000 visitors tramped through its halls on the opening day. The Seneca Hotel, opened a month later amidst similar festivities, was ready the next day to serve as the headquarters hotel for the Democrat State Conventions, which had agreed to return to Rochester that year with the assurance that both of the two new hotels as well as the Powers would be available for its delegates.

The style with which Rochester entertained the Democratic State Convention of 1908 assured its standing as a convention city. Mayor Edgerton pressed the next year for an enlargement of Convention Hall to provide more adequate facilities for large mass meetings, and the only criticism he received was from the editor of the *Post Express* who considered the architecture of that hall unworthy of Rochester. The city attracted four national conventions that year, including that of the Photographic Association of America, which brought 1,785 delegates to Rochester in July 1909 winning praise for the facilities of the Kodak City. The American Association of Nurserymen had met at Rochester with headquarters at the Seneca Hotel in June, and so many applications for convention space were arriving that the Chamber of Commerce, which listed 44 for 1910, placed Rochester at the top of the list in number of conventions, though second-place Atlantic City and a few other metropolises would

attract several of the largest conventions.

The city pressed forward with the enlargement of Convention Hall in 1910. It was ready for use by the Playground Association of America, which brought 600 delegates to Rochester in June 1910 and won some modest praise for the city's playground program. Rochester's Chamber of Commerce spent \$5500 on entertainment costs for the Democratic State Convention, which again met at the Seneca Hotel that year, but the editor of the Herald estimated the returns on that investment at \$100,000 spent by the delegates in the city's hotels and other establishments. Indeed the returns seemed so rewarding that the Chamber published a pamphlet boosting *Rochester, New York, The Convention City* and boldly agreed to schedule the 37th Annual National Convention of the Mystic Shrine for July 1911. Although its 4000 delegates overtaxed the city's facilities, the drama supplied by the Shriners parade and the excitement of the carnival atmosphere in the city parks encouraged the Convention Committee of the Chamber to help raise \$60,000 to bring the national convention of Elks to Rochester in July 1913. Again the Seneca served as the headquarters hotel, but the 7000 Elks who inundated the city overflowed all downtown and suburban hotel facilities and created such confusion that both business and civic leaders determined never again to bid for such a large convention.

Yet Rochester's standing as a convention city commanded support. The American Optical Association, which brought 1000 delegates to Rochester to tour its optical plants and attend sessions at Convention Hall as well as in the Seneca Hotel ballroom, attracted more favor than the flamboyant Elks. Several of the thirty-two other conventions that visited Rochester that year also made constructive contributions to the life of the city. In November when George Dietrich, the outgoing president of the

Chamber of Commerce, reviewed the impact of the two hundred conventions that had visited Rochester since the enlargement of Convention Hall he judged it a positive gain for the city and a boon for its hotels. A year later, in fact, the Chamber's Convention Committee was ready to reorganize itself as a semi-autonomous Convention Bureau.

Two additional developments of the pre-war years contributed a permanent feature to the city's hotels. The appearance of a new group of luncheon clubs—the Ad Club, organized in October 1909, the City Club a month later, and the first local Rotary Club in 1911—created a new use for downtown hotel banquet halls and added a significant new dimension to urban life as their members devoted at least one noon each week to a club luncheon. The luncheon speaker on civic topics became so popular that these clubs prospered and stimulated the formation of other clubs such as the Kiwanis, the Lions, the Optimists, and several women's clubs that met for weekly luncheons or more infrequent banquets in hotel ballrooms. Of course the increased local uses of the hotels did not overshadow their services to out-of-town travelers, and in May 1913 the Gideons, a Christian Organization of Traveling Men, announced their intention, with the consent of the hotel managers of Rochester, to place a Bible in every hotel room in Rochester. By the tenth of that month they had distributed 1500 Bibles to the ten leading hotels establishing a service which has become a permanent feature.

The late teens and twenties brought several changes in Rochester's hotels. The Hayward Hotel erected on Clinton Avenue South near Main Street in 1913 was leased two years later by the Odenbach Company, Rochester's famous restaurateur, who also absorbed the Whitcomb House a decade later. With the completion of the 10-story Richfield Hotel at Elm and Chestnut Streets in 1915, the eastward migration of the hotel trade was

accelerated, prompting the final closing of the pioneer Mansion House on State Street. The construction in 1923 of the Sagamore Hotel on East Avenue, designed as an apartment hotel chiefly for resident use, soon made some of its facilities available to transients, while its dining hall, club rooms, and a roof-top banquet hall supplied facilities where many gay festivities were held during the late twenties. The prosperous twenties prompted the erection of the 8-story Cadillac Hotel and the 100-room Eastman Hotel, both on Chestnut Street, and of the Edison Hotel nearby on Elm Street, while the conversion of an older structure at Clinton and Andrews Streets into the Claridge Hotel further strengthened the eastward trend. These moderate sized structures, with one to two hundred rooms each, supplemented the facilities of the four leading hotels—the Powers, the Seneca, the Rochester and the Osburn—which supplied the major accommodations for the numerous conventions brought to Rochester by the Convention Bureau in these halcyon years.

The fortunes of Rochester's hotel men declined sharply during the thirties. The Richford, renamed the Ford Hotel in 1929, continued under that name and management, but both the Sagamore and the Eastman were forced into receivership by the onset of the depression and remained under a cloud for several years. The Sheraton Hotel Corporation of Boston finally acquired the Sagamore and after remodeling most of its apartments into single rooms renamed it the Sheraton in the late 1930's. While the Sheraton thus became one of the city's four leading hotels, the Osburn House, renamed the Milner Hotel, suffered a loss of first class patronage when the commercial occupants of its street level stores withdrew because of the impending demolition of the hotel for an extension of Broad Street. The long delay in the extension of that street coupled with the protracted effects of the depression blighted the fortunes of

several other Rochester hotels. The old Eggleston Hotel on South Avenue closed its doors in 1936 and the Rochester Hotel, after several changes in ownership, became the property of the Manger chain in 1939. The Hayward Hotel at Main and Clinton and the Milner on South Avenue became resident hotels for single men of advancing years.

Several factors brought a pause in the city's hotel developments during the forties and set the stage for rapid changes in the fifties. World War II not only halted hotel construction but also forced a sharp decline in the number of conventions. On the other hand, the rationing of gasoline, by concentrating travelers into downtown hotels, prolonged the services even of those with marginal facilities. Yet both the Hayward Hotel on Clinton Avenue and its Whitcomb House annex on Main Street gave way to new commercial structures in 1947. As the number and use of automobiles mounted in the post-war years, however, a rapid shift of the traveling public to roadside motorlodges occurred, and in the fifties Rochester saw the construction of numerous motels including six that supplied from 80 to 142 rooms each. The two largest—the Treadway opened on East Avenue at Alexander Street in 1954, and the Towne House opened on Mt. Hope at Elmwood Avenue four years later—each provided all the accommodations of first class hotels, including dining facilities to serve city residents as well as transients. The competition they offered to the older hotels was cushioned by the increased demand for hotel accommodations created by the opening of the War Memorial in 1955. Its modern facilities for large meetings and exhibits made it an ideal headquarters for large conventions as well as for sports events and tournaments. Rochester's prospects as a convention city revived and the final closing in 1959 of the Mills Hotel (formerly the Milner and the Osburn) was occasioned by the

extension of Broad Street, while the Rochester Hotel on the westside was acquired by the Rochester Institute of Technology and redesigned for use as a student residence hall.

As the popularity of the motorlodge increased in the early sixties older hotels that wished to maintain their standing had to modernize their services and provide on-the-site parking. A reviving demand for convention space hastened the construction in 1961 of the 240-room **Downtowner** on South Avenue where the newly extended Broad Street gave it the strategic location the Milner had lacked. Equipped with dining and parking facilities that equaled those of the Treadway and Towne House, it stole a lead on these rivals by installing a swimming pool, the first in any Rochester hotel, though the New Country Squire, which had opened the year before south of the city on Henrietta Road offered a pool as well as a putting field to attract travelers exiting from the Thruway at that point. The Country Squire shared the tourist trade with the nearby Trenholm Motel and with several lesser motor lodges, while the Travelodge chain opened new facilities at the airport on Brooks Avenue.

None of the older hotels could escape this mounting competition. The Powers Hotel closed its doors in the early sixties and after a period of uncertainty reopened as an office structure. The Sheraton Hotel on East Avenue added a motorlodge wing and a diminutive pool in 1964 in a determined effort to meet the new competition, but its managers soon gave up the struggle and prepared to reconvert its rooms into apartments as originally planned—years before. The owners of the Richford Hotel (the former Ford Hotel) finally determined to convert that 10-story structure into offices, while the owners of the Manger (the former Seneca on Clinton Avenue) faced with the rising value of their site, sold out in 1969 to developers who promptly demolished it to make way for a new commercial block. In con-

trast, the old Rochester Hotel, no longer needed by the Rochester Institute of Technology after its removal to a new campus south of Rochester, was reconverted for hotel use to help meet the mounting demand for hotel rooms for conventions and other purposes. Indeed the Convention Bureau, which played host to over 116 conventions annually during the sixties and reached a high point with 73,000 registered visitors in 1966 and an estimated expenditure of \$6.5 million among city merchants, became concerned two years later lest the planned closure of two old hotels leave Rochester unable to meet the needs of its commercial visitors as well as those of its convention guests.

The demise of several of Rochester's older hotels has hastened and been hastened by the projection of three modern new downtown inns. The opening of the new Flagship Rochester in May 1969 is only the first of several dramatic new developments in the city's hotel accommodations. Its 400 luxurious rooms overlooking the spacious river plaza of Rochester's Crossroads Redevelopment project, with an open swimming pool and ample space for parking underground, will soon face the competition of a new Holliday Inn in the 14-story structure now rising across the river at Main and St. Paul Streets. Yet, even the Holliday Inn, with its 502 rooms and supporting facilities has not deterred the plans of the Hilton Hotel chain to erect still another hotel overlooking the river south of Court Street where construction has already commenced on a 400-room hotel ideally situated to receive and despatch travelers over the Eastern and Southern expressways and the Inner Loop with the War Memorial and Midtown Plaza a brief and scenic block or two distant.