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Rochester's City Halls

by Joseph W. Barnes

The dedication of Rochester's old federal building this year as its new city hall is a landmark event. The city's commitment of capital funds to refurbish a neglected Victorian building which seemed scheduled for destruction is part of a dramatic story. In recent years the movement to preserve sound and esthetically pleasing structures, long the crusade of dedicated individuals and private organizations, has captured the imaginations of many leaders in local government as well as representatives of the real estate and business communities. Rochester, with its active Landmark Society dating from 1937, has been a leader in several respects in the preservationist cause. The adoption of ordinances creating a Preservation Board in 1968 placed Rochester in the vanguard of cities willing to use zoning powers to curtail debasement or destruction of landmark buildings. In the past ten years the creation of preservation districts has supplemented what has become a vigorous trend in many parts of the city to conserve worthwhile houses and other structures. The city's decision to move offices and council chamber into the abandoned federal

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building re-emphasizes municipal initiative in the cause of preservation.

But another dimension in the story of Rochester's new city hall, and certainly an important one, is the history of Rochester's *city halls*. For generations local government has grappled with the task of providing adequate accommodations for office functions and for public gatherings. Although Rochester was settled 166 years ago (and has been a chartered city for 144 years), during that time it has constructed only a single separated city hall, the gray sandstone building on Broad and Fitzhugh Streets. Dedicated in 1875, "old city hall" was both a source of considerable civic pride and the focus of political controversy. The building was very satisfactory for its purposes for a few decades. Even during the administration of Mayor Hiram Edgerton early in this century, however, many persons complained of its inadequacy. A series of proposals for grand civic center developments to replace the aging city hall began to appear at that time. At last, in the 1950s a civic center was partially constructed. It was never quite completed because of the city's and county's inability to agree on construction of a joint office building. That inability paved the way for the city's independent decision to preserve the federal building for its own use.

Taverns and Stores and Clerk's Offices

The *Records of the Doings* or official minutes of Rochester's village trustees have survived intact from May 7, 1817, when the newly elected trustees of the Village of Rochesterville held their organizational meeting. On that day the five trustees gathered at the tavern of Lebbeus Elliot, located "in Buffalo Street,"¹ to elect Francis Brown president and designate other officers. (Buffalo Street was renamed Main Street West in 1871.) In succeeding months the trustees occasionally met in Francis Brown's office, or in his store, but they also resorted to the Mansion House (a popular hotel and tavern) or to a place offered by one or another trustee. Thus the business of the infant village was officially conducted "At the office of H. R. Bender," where the first municipal code, called the "Bye-Laws and Regulations," was adopted, or "In Everard Peck's Chamber." During 1818 the meeting place was frequently

the “Counting Room of Ira West” or “Everard Peck’s Store.” After the election of Moses Chapin as Village Clerk in 1819, meetings took place for several years in his office.²

A striking fact about the meeting rooms of the Village of Rochester (the redundant “...ville” was dropped in 1822) is their size. No great importance was attached to public attendance of the trustees’ gatherings, and with some reason. The early village charters, modeled after a New England pattern, placed actual fiscal responsibility on the freeholders and inhabitants qualified to vote for assemblymen.³ Meetings of the freeholders and inhabitants were conducted two or three times a year. In May trustees were elected and annual expenses appropriated. Later in the year, generally in November or December, villagers gathered to approve additional sums and to discuss major public improvements. The first, and subsequently frequent, location for village meetings was in a schoolhouse, probably the frame structure that originally occupied the site of the Free Academy building on Fitzhugh Street. Numerous meetings were also called at the tavern houses of John G. Christopher or Azel Ensworth.⁴

Municipal government in the beginning years was extremely modest. The village was limited by its original charter to an annual expenditure no greater than \$1,000. Sometimes the villagers would not permit the trustees that much extravagance, and public services were minimal. Buffalo Street itself remained unimproved and wagons often sank to the hubcaps in its mud.⁵ The major functions exercised by village government throughout its existence (1817-1834) were regulatory. Numerous ordinances banning unsanitary practices and fire hazards and those prohibiting the blocking of roadways and keeping animals at large made up the bulk of the trustees published actions. Some sloughs were drained and primitive sewers installed in the main thoroughfares, but with the exception of a public market built in the mid-’20s, the village lacked the resources for major undertakings.

Such poverty helps explain Rochester’s first conflict with Monroe County which was created in 1821. The conflict relates to the story of Rochester’s city halls, since the argument over who should pay for reconstructing Buffalo (Main) Street Bridge seems to have delayed the village’s use of the new county court house. The bridge was vital to the interests of both villagers and country farmers. Built in 1810-12, it was a

wooden affair in much need of repair ten years later. The village petitioned the county to perform this service, which after all was for the benefit of all county residents, and when the supervisors from the country towns voted to levy one-fourth of the cost of repairs as a special tax on Rochester, the villagers protested vehemently.⁶

At the time of the dispute county supervisors began meeting in the court house, newly constructed in 1822.⁷ The village trustees meanwhile gathered at the office of the village clerk, Hastings R. Bender, or in Silas Smith's store. In Azel Ensworth's tavern in April 1823, they voted to "remonstrate" against the special levy for bridge repairs. The same month saw them gather "near the court house," on another occasion, "in the Street of Rochester," to conduct some routine business.⁸ At last the quarrel was smoothed over by a county decision to reduce expenditures on the bridge by more than half (from \$14,000 to \$6,000). Beginning in May 1823, the trustees began using the court house for their meetings. The freeholders and inhabitants, who continued to meet in taverns for another year, voted in December to appropriate "a sum not to exceed \$15" from the contingency fund to help pay for bridge repairs."⁹



Court House Square, 1827

Camera lucida sketch published originally in Basil Hall, *Forty Etchings* (Edinburgh, 1829).

The first county court house was used partly for village and city purposes from 1823 until 1846. It was located on the same court house square now occupied by the third court house building. Being much smaller, it occupied only a portion of the ground in the southern half, allowing for open ground on Buffalo Street. The land was a gift to the public from Nathaniel Rochester and his partners William Fitzhugh and Charles Carroll. The surplus land facing Buffalo Street was seen as a potential source of revenue by the county supervisors, who leased portions to John B. Elwood and Vincent Matthews for construction of a doctor's office and a lawyer's office. The court house building, thus framed behind the little Greek-revival offices and in front of the First Presbyterian Church—or wedged in among them, measured 54 by 44 feet and was 40 feet high. It was built of local stone with two chimneys on either end wall. Each front, the one facing Buffalo Street and that facing the church, was finished with four Ionic columns. The cost was \$7,000.¹⁰

The part of the building used by the village trustees from 1823 until 1834 was the office of the village clerk, located in a portion of the basement. The annual meetings of the villagers, which continued in a perfunctory fashion after enlargement of the trustee's powers by charter amendments in the mid-'20s, may have taken place in one of the larger chambers upstairs.

A City Hall/County Court House

The familiar theme in the history of Rochester's first decades is the story of its phenomenal growth. According to the federal census, its population in 1830 exceeded 9,000, in 1840, 20,000, and in 1850, 36,000. These tabulations of population growth cast an indirect light on the increasing necessity for more public services in the booming town. Agitation for a city charter began as early as 1826, and the state legislature at last granted one in 1834.¹¹

In practical terms, the first city charter provided for a common council of aldermen elected from the wards to take the place of the old village board of trustees. The common council elected a mayor, drew up an annual budget, and possessed other powers; but the most important change was the council's fiscal independence. Moreover, the city charter

set a new limit of \$8,000 on annual expenditures.¹² Rochester's boundaries, which in 1827 had already expanded to take in territory on the east side of the river, were greatly enlarged.

Winning a city charter was, aside from its practical consequences, an event of some symbolic importance. For this reason the first mayor, Jonathan Child, prepared an inaugural speech containing phrases worthy of a great occasion, addressed to the persons who had built the city:

The rapid progress which our place has made, from a wilderness to an incorporated city, authorises each of our citizens proudly to reflect upon the agency he has had in bringing about this great and interesting change... Well, then, may we indulge an honest pride as we look back upon our past history, and let the review elevate our hopes and animate our exertions.¹³

There were cynics present in that June of 1834, however, who questioned whether the "Young Lion of the West" might not more aptly retain its title of "City of Mud."¹⁴ In the following years, city officials faced the challenge of improving streets and sidewalks, supplying sewers, fire equipment, lights, and the watch—and a host of miscellaneous services—in the face of constant growth and tight fiscal restraints. The new city's progress in meeting these civic challenges was gradual, as was its progress toward finding a civic hall worthy of its status.

Until 1846 or 1847, the common council met in the grand jury room of the rapidly aging court house. Perceiving Rochester's new municipal wealth, the county supervisors, in October, 1834, resolved to lease the room to the aldermen for thirty dollars annually.¹⁵ The rent was never collected. In the following year rent was remitted and the city was permitted to continue to use the room provided that the city kept the room in good repair and also maintained the court house square.¹⁶

While the use of its part of the court house was rent-free, the space provided to the city was insufficient for its expanding functions. Henry O'Reilly notes in *Sketches of Rochester* (1838) that "the corporation of the city and the mayor's court are accomodated with a room occupying half of the first story [of the court house]." The tone of O'Reilly's pioneer history is almost uniformly boosterish, but in this passage he adds that "a city hall is much wanted to accommodate the various officers of the city and to promote the convenience of the citizens who have business with them."¹⁷ Mayor Elisha

Johnson echoed these sentiments before the common council.¹⁸

Temporarily, the city resorted to the expedient of quartering some of its offices in scattered spaces. In the long run, the two alternatives were to create a separate city hall or to persuade the county to cooperate in constructing a larger combined building. Prospects for the latter alternative were dim for some time. Inter-governmental relations became strained when, in 1836, the county refused to pay its share of a city assessment for improvements in Buffalo Street which included sewers, sidewalks, and macadamizing. In 1837 another dispute arose over payment for repairs of the bridge.¹⁹ When a resolution was introduced at a board of supervisors meeting in 1841 calling for a \$20,000 bond issue to help pay for a new court house, the outnumbered supervisors from the city were joined only by those from Greece, Brighton, Gates, and Pittsford, and the measure was defeated twelve to nine.²⁰

In 1846 the common council seized an opportunity to consolidate its offices in a rented city hall and wait for a time when the supervisors would prove less dilatory. Everard Peck, the pioneer newspaperman, printer, bookseller, and paper



North Side of Main Street West, c.1881

The Peck Block, an undistinguished five-story building on the right side of the photograph, was the location of Rochester's rented city hall, 1846-1851.

manufacturer, constructed a substantial building on the north side of Buffalo Street on the west corner of Pindell Alley—directly opposite the court house yard. The city leased two floors of Peck’s building and “fitted them up” for the accommodation of the common council, mayor’s court, and clerk, treasurer, surveyor, and superintendent. One local newspaper felt that “the new Hall...contrasts creditably with the little seven by nine jury room...which...by the sufferance of the Board of Supervisors [has] been used ever since the city was chartered.”²¹

The same newspaper suggested that “the laws of decomposition progressing,” it would not be long before the pioneer court house would be “numbered with the things that have been.”²² Five short years after the establishment of Rochester’s leased city hall, county and city moved into a new combined city hall/court house on the site of the first court house. Although generally known as the second court house, city funds paid for some \$38,000 of the building’s \$63,000 cost.²³ A written agreement specified that the city was to occupy the east half of the new building; that county and city should each be strictly responsible for furnishing and maintenance of its half; and that the county could, in future, buy out the city’s interest in the building after due notice.²⁴

The second court house, built 1850-51, was twice as large as the first. Designed by local architect Merwin Austin, who had recently apprenticed his nephew, Andrew J. Warner, it rose three stories above the basement. The peculiarly narrow dome was topped by cupola and a gilded figure of justice. The dome contained a large bell, paid for by the city, to be used as a much-needed fire alarm.

During the ’50s the city set about furnishing its part of the new building—particularly the “city hall proper”—in appropriate style. Bronze and gilt gas-burning chandeliers in the large meeting hall illuminated aldermanic proceedings and special events, such as the display of a diorama of the holy land in 1853.²⁵ The *Daily Democrat* concluded that the new hall “is justly considered the pride of the city—easy of access, conveniently seated and fitted up, with all the improvements that a liberal city government could bestow.”²⁶ It was during these years that the common council began collecting portraits of ex-mayors; \$150 was appropriated to help pay for a full-length painting of Jonathan Child, contingent on the donation

of their own portraits by a majority of the ex-mayors.²⁷ Thus begun, the city gradually assembled a valuable portrait collection which would grace the walls of later city halls.



Second Court House in 1877

Reproduced from W. H. McIntosh, *History of Monroe County, New York* (Philadelphia, 1877).

“Old” City Hall

Inevitably, Rochester’s continued growth and the increased business of its government would lead to demands for new municipal quarters. The city’s population of 36,400 in 1850 rose to 63,400 in 1870. Even more dramatic was the increase in the city’s annual expenditures. In 1851, the year the second court house was completed, the city spent some \$111,000; twenty years later annual expenditures stood at \$825,000.²⁸ The board of supervisors also faced enlarged responsibilities, as their ever more protracted bi-annual gatherings in the second court house during the ’50s and ’60s attest.²⁹

In 1869, an opportunity arose to buy the property of the First Presbyterian Church located behind the court house. The old stone church, built in 1825, was already structurally unsafe when a fire destroyed its steeple. Rather than rebuild, the congregation determined to move elsewhere and a bargain was

struck with the common council to sell the lot for \$25,000.³⁰ The supervisors, who had been considering the construction of annexes on Fitzhugh Street and Irving Place to accommodate certain county offices, were now persuaded to buy out the city's section of the court house instead. The agreement, negotiated in 1870, called for a payment of \$55,000, stipulated that the city should retain its bell, and allowed two years for the city to vacate the court house.³¹ However, four years passed before the city completed its new city hall.

Delay was caused both by partisan conflict and debate over the suitability of the site behind the court house. Eastsiders persuaded the council to approve the purchase of a different site at Main and Clinton Streets, but the measure was blocked by a mayoral veto. Other schemes to locate city hall on the river near Main Street Bridge, or on land occupied by the public market on Front Street, were also advanced. Councilmanic bickering over the project and speculation in land values in different sections invited bitter charges by editorialists and authors of letters-to-the-editor, who compared events with those in New York City, recently controlled by the Tweed Ring.³² In 1872 Council President George Aldridge Sr. and newly-elected Mayor A. Carter Wilder, both Republicans, secured the cooperation of Democratic Assemblyman George D. Lord to obtain state legislation for a special three-member City Hall Commission. Similar commissions were created to handle the completion of the water works and to build the Free Academy.³³ Although the commissions were models for an Executive Board which managed all public works for the balance of the century, they, and the Board, were imperfect solutions to the problem of collusive contracts.

The disagreeable aspects of local political life were largely forgotten during the cornerstone laying in May, 1873, for "New City Hall," commemorated in the title of a "grand march" written by local musician Leopold Haak. The cornerstone laying was preceded by a lengthy parade and accompanied by the speechmaking and elaborate Masonic ceremony deemed appropriate for such an occasion. The building, the final cost of which was \$337,000, rose quickly under the guidance of local architect Andrew J. Warner. It was substantially complete in 1874 and was opened to the public with a concert on the evening of January 4, 1875. According to

William F. Peck, a contemporary historian, the proceeds of the “entertainment” were earmarked in aid of “famine sufferers in the West.”³⁴ In the winter of 1874-75 charitable people in the eastern United States were much concerned with the effects of a grasshopper plague that had devastated Kansas.

The public concert which formally opened the city hall took place in the “city hall proper,” an amphitheater occupying the entire fourth, or top, floor of the building. The large hall, with a capacity of 3,000 persons, was among the features of Warner’s design that won widespread praise. In architectural style, the building now called “old city hall” represents a transition between the Ruskinian Gothic popular earlier in the century— exemplified by James Renwick’s Smithsonian building—and the rounded neo-Romanesque buildings of the 1880s, of which Rochester’s Federal Building/ New City Hall is a good example. Old city hall’s handsome exterior was embellished by Warner’s use of rough gray sandstone. Particularly handsome was its bell tower surmounted by a double spire, at the time of its construction one of the tallest structures in the city. ³⁵

Unfortunately, the topmost spire was removed in the early 1940s. Old city hall’s first major modification took place in 1896. As part of a general interior remodeling, the fourth floor amphitheater was converted into two floors of office space, giving the building a fifth story.³⁶ That conversion was undertaken to meet the constant demand for additional office space, as the city, and city government, continued to grow. The most drastic compromise of the building’s original design occurred during the 1920s and 1930s, when city hall’s main entrance became a back entrance and a new front entrance was carved in the back wall. The unfortunate construction of a low “Annex” behind the third court house (County Office Building) in 1926 covered the remaining open space separating the court house from city hall and blocked the porch-like entrance to city hall designed by A. J. Warner.

In the same year the city was nearing completion of its subway and the conversion of the Erie Canal bed into Broad Street by means of a concrete deck. The rear of city hall would now be freely open to pedestrian traffic, although it was not until 1937 that a small W.P.A. grant was secured to pay for construction of a new entrance.

The U.S. Court House, Post Office & etc./New City Hall

Coincidentally, the drive to secure a U. S. Court House and Post Office, or “federal building,” as it would come to be called, began at the same time city aldermen were wrestling over the location of the city hall. In 1871 the county supervisors joined the city council in a resolution urging the “speedy erection of suitable government buildings.” The reasons for the request are of interest, as is the language of the petition itself:

In view of the large and increasing population and business necessities of the city of Rochester and county of Monroe, now requiring almost the exclusive occupation of the public buildings of said city, and also in view of the facts that regular terms of the United States District Courts are now held in said city, and a custom house, post-office and other general government offices are now maintained by the general government in said city, but that the same are now provided for at much inconvenience and unnecessary expense; therefore....³⁷

The resolution continues by urging the “propriety and necessity” of the introduction of legislation by the local representatives in Congress.

In the decades after the Civil War, cities throughout the United States similarly petitioned for federal buildings. Each proposed new building required Congressional approval, obtained by local representatives who were able to draw on arguments like those advanced by Rochester’s leaders. In the “gilded age” between the presidencies of Ulysses Grant and William McKinley, the government was already viewed, at least by one official responsible for housing it, as “a vast and ponderous machine.”³⁸ And yet, at the beginning of this era, the federal government owned little office or warehouse space outside of Washington and a few major cities. In 1870 and 1880, Rochester was among the twenty-five largest cities in the nation, but its post office occupied rented space in the old Reynolds Arcade—where it had been since 1829. Circumstances such as this, repeated with variations throughout the country, helped Congressmen argue persuasively during logrolling sessions for federal buildings in each of their own districts.

The result was a steady year-by-year increase in the number of new buildings authorized and Congressional appropriations to pay for them. In the ten year period 1876-

1886 the government spent an average \$3,450,000 annually on construction.³⁹ That was a substantial expenditure; during the same years the total federal budget averaged about \$254 million. By the mid-'80s, when Rochester's federal building was designed, as many as 80 buildings were in the course of construction at one time.⁴⁰ This extraordinary activity in erecting buildings in the last third of the nineteenth century represents an important, if little recognized, part of the federal government's contribution to national public works history and the development of American architecture.

Rochester's federal building was authorized by Congress in 1882, but it was not ready for occupancy until 1891. Nine years from approval to completion was a very long time, particularly by nineteenth century construction standards. Delay in the completion of federal buildings was common, however, because of the Congressional habit of raising the limit of expenditure on buildings in the course of construction. The construction history of Rochester's building began with site selection in 1883; the government selected the site of Church and Fitzhugh Streets on the advice of a panel of local commissioners appointed to deal with that question. In 1884 ground was broken and the following year good progress was made on a modest L-shaped building. In 1886, however, Congress raised the limit of cost from \$300,000 to \$500,000. Masonry work which had been completed as far as the second-story sill course has to be partly disassembled and a larger building designed.⁴¹ The plans for the second building, which retained the corner tower from the first in a subdued form, reflected an extensive redesign. Included in the plans for the larger building was the interior cortile or atrium which is now regarded as the building's most dramatic and successful feature.⁴² Further delay in completion may have been caused by another supplementary appropriation, in 1888, to pay for fire-proof construction.

The government agency entrusted with the work of designing and overseeing the construction of federal buildings was the Office of the Supervising Architect in the Treasury Department. Successive Supervising Architects in this period complained bitterly about the handicaps under which they worked, among them the necessity for making new designs for buildings already under construction at the whim of Congress. The overall work load of the Office was another source of



Old City Hall, Dedicated 1875



U.S. Court House and Post Office/New City Hall
Reproduced from W. H. Parish Publishing Co., *Art Work of Rochester, Part I* (1896).

complaint which led several Supervising Architects to suggest schemes for opening the opportunity to design new buildings to outside architects. Supervising Architects did employ local “superintendents of construction” on a *per diem* basis to oversee the erection of buildings during this era. Charles Ellis, a Rochester architect whose brother Harvey later achieved widespread notoriety for his skills as a draftsman—though little contemporary recognition—briefly held such a post in 1884, giving rise to a local tradition that Harvey’s sketches influenced the design of the federal building here. But the practice of throwing open design work to outside architects did not become legally permissible until the 1890s and was not instituted until the twentieth century. No other Supervising Architect was as outspoken in his complaints as Mifflin E. Bell, the incumbent during the mid-’80s and architect of Rochester Court House and Post Office.⁴³

Appointed in 1883 at the age of 36, Bell was then the youngest Supervising Architect ever chosen. As was usual among architects of his generation, he had learned his profession through apprenticeship and on-the-job training. Bell’s tutor was the French architect Alfred H. Piquenard, with whom he worked on the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield after the Civil War. Subsequently in partnership with another Piquenard student, William Hackney, Bell secured a number of contracts, the most important of which was for the redesign and completion of the Iowa State Capitol. The Iowa project was one in which Bell took particular pride and it helped secure his appointment as Supervising Architect during the administration of Chester A. Arthur. The Secretary of the Treasury directly responsible for his appointment was Charles Folger, a western New Yorker.⁴⁴

Mifflin Bell’s tenure, which lasted until 1887 under both Republican and Democratic administrations, was unusually long and productive. One contemporary source credits Bell with producing designs that were “refreshingly original and entirely out of the government conventional style which had been so monotonous previous to his work.”⁴⁵ Although Bell worked in a variety of styles, he commonly used the neo-Romanesque idiom of the Rochester building. He produced a number of buildings similar to Rochester’s for cities in other parts of the country, but the federal building here was perhaps the best among them. During the nearly four years Bell served

as Supervising Architect, his office produced designs for large and small buildings in forty-two cities. The buildings in larger cities for which Bell took personal credit included those in Rochester, Syracuse, Dallas, Lexington, Brooklyn, and Minneapolis. After leaving the federal service Bell began private practice in Chicago, where he received commissions for a number of fine private residences, smaller cousins in style to the Rochester federal building, and some commercial buildings. Bell died in 1904.⁴⁶

The exterior of the Rochester federal building, executed in a dull brown Connecticut sandstone and granite, might have emerged jail-like and oppressive had it not been for Bell's skillful use of ornamental detail and his attention to shaping, particularly in the case of the corner tower. With its small dormers and double hipped roof, the tower adds grace to the building in the same fashion as the tower on the A. J. Warner city hall two blocks away which it resembles. Although the style of the federal building, a fully developed 1880s neo-Romanesque, differs from that of the earlier city hall, there is a similarity in the base shaping of the two buildings which suggests a deliberate effort to achieve balance between them. However, no historical evidence exists to show that Bell was aware of the city hall or that he even visited Rochester.

If the exterior of the federal building could be considered a handsome representation of the government style of the period, its interior was supplied with features which lent an air of opulence. The atrium, or cortile as Bell himself called it, attracted admiration at the time of the building's opening and draws special attention today.⁴⁷ Noteworthy is the use of several different colored marbles in the arcades enclosing the cortile and the architect's attention to joinery and wood trim throughout the building. The use of wood trim is particularly effective in the third-floor court room, now converted to a city council chamber.⁴⁸

Despite the federal building's impressive architectural detail—not to mention its impressive cost, which eventually approached \$600,000 including the site—its construction attracted relatively little attention in the local press. The usual Masonic ceremonies and parade accompanied a cornerstone laying in 1885. The protracted delay in completing the building (under the direction of Mifflin Bell's successors) received only desultory notices. Delay may have contributed to the public's

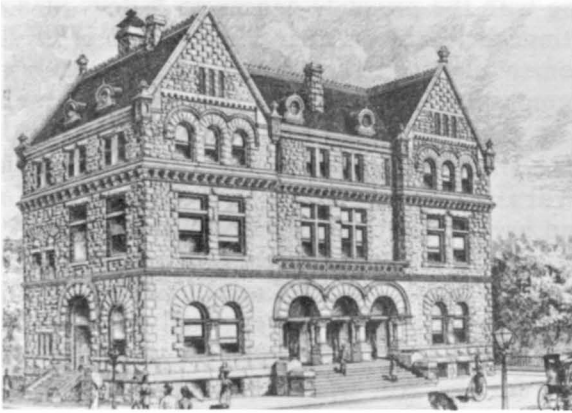
inattention when post office clerks, with little fanfare, at last occupied the ground floor during March, 1891.⁴⁹

Until construction of the central post office on Cumberland Street in 1933, the federal building functioned chiefly as a post office, although it also housed the customs and internal revenue services, the United States district court, the weather bureau, and miscellaneous federal offices.⁵⁰ In the 1930s the government remodeled the interior, partly to accommodate the offices of the Social Security Administration, the Federal Housing Authority, and other new agencies.⁵¹ During times of national emergency the building of course became the center of increased attention. Thousands of local men passed through its doors to register for the draft or to speak with recruiters for one or another of the military services in each time of war. In recent memory the federal building made a rare appearance as the focus for front page news when, in July, 1970, selective service files were damaged following a break-in by persons opposed to the Viet Nam war; the incident and trial of the "Flower City conspirators" which followed received national attention. Even before that incident, in 1965, the General



Federal Buildings of the mid-1880s

Above: Rochester, N.Y.; *opposite page, top to bottom:* Augusta, Me.; New Albany, Ind.; Lexington, Ky. Reproduced from *American Architect and Building News*, Vol. XX (Sept. 18, 1886), No. 560.



Services Administration in announcing plans for a new Rochester federal building on State Street declared that the old structure would be sold for demolition.⁵²

A New City Hall

The old city hall designed by A. J. Warner remained the only building in the city's history constructed specifically as a city hall. As was noted in the beginning of this essay, its continued adequacy was first questioned early in the present century, but a combination of circumstances delayed its replacement. The series of proposals for new civic development which reflected Rochester's awareness of the "city beautiful" movement, beginning with the privately conceived Wilgus plan of 1908 and continued with the Brunner-Olmsted plan of 1911 and the Bartholomew plan of 1930, among others, probably helped delay commitment of funds for a new municipal building by holding up examples which were too ambitious for the city's resources. The intervention of the Great Depression and World War II brought further delay.⁵³ The pressure for office space had been at least partly relieved in 1924 when George Eastman, who favored the concept of a civic center along the Genesee River, purchased the Kimball Tobacco Factory and made it available for use as a city hall annex. Its use was considered only a temporary expedient and its demolition to make way for the War Memorial Auditorium in the early 1950s helped revive the civic center idea.

The city's need for new office space was again partly relieved with the construction of the Public Safety Building in 1963 as part of the jointly financed city-county civic center. The civic center was to have been completed with a high-rise city-county office building straddling Exchange Street, but owing in part to political differences between the two municipalities the project never left the drawing board. Meanwhile, the old city hall which had not enjoyed thorough renovation since the 1890s was not only cramped but was becoming increasingly unsafe.

It was thus that protracted delay in replacing one landmark structure led to the salvation of another. In 1972, when officials dedicated the new \$14 million Rochester federal building, the destruction of the old one seemed nearly certain.

Already, however, the Landmark Society of Western New York had submitted an application to gain National Register status for the building while the city's Preservation Board conferred to make it an official city landmark.⁵⁴ Owing to Executive Order 11593, the General Services Administration was cooperative in delaying the sale or demolition of the building. The city, which changed administrations following local elections in 1973, was persuaded to pay for a series of feasibility studies on the re-adaptation of the structure for use as a new city hall.

Superficial deterioration and unwise maintenance practices in the old federal building gave rise to more than a few second thoughts about its suitability for purchase and reuse. Strongly worded editorials in both local newspapers suggested that preservationist efforts in its behalf were misdirected.⁵⁵ Indeed, during the last years of federal ownership the building presented a forbidding and gloomy appearance. Much of its interior had, over the years, received coats of government green paint; woodwork was covered with dark varnish and falling plaster attested to problems in the roof. Dirt covered the exterior sandstone and the skylight which had been designed to illuminate the cortile.

These problems and more serious concerns about ways in which the building could be made to conform to present-day building codes were imaginatively addressed in proposals by the local architectural firm of Handler and Grosso, which won the contract to oversee reconstruction work in 1976. The re-adaptation of the building as a city hall included the installation of a new concrete floor within the cortile at the level where an interior skylight had originally provided a ceiling over the work space for postal clerks. Besides adding to fire safety, the new floor level was designed to supply public access to the dramatic open area of the cortile. A modern ventilating system incorporated this open space in the building's heating plan. Potential energy savings in the building were among the arguments for saving it, which centered on the economics of re-adaptation *versus* new construction. Other modifications of the building included the construction of new stairways and the replacement of the old balustraded stairway in the tower (which could not conform to fire codes) with an elevator bank. To provide additional office area, the architects designed a semi-detached addition in a simplified modern style covered

with concrete panels in a color simulating the brown sandstone of the main building. On the whole, the plan for re-adaptation preserves as much as possible the decorative quality of the old federal building; wherever it was economically unfeasible to disguise modernization, new elements were introduced in skillful attempts to make them harmonize with the old.

New City Hall, dedicated with a week of community celebration May 5-13, 1978, is a proud embellishment of Rochester's commitment to improve the quality of its urban life. The restoration of this monumental nineteenth century building does not complete the work of local preservationists. Indeed, the abandonment of the A. J. Warner city hall presents a new dilemma. But Rochester, in giving itself this particular city hall, sets an example of respect for the past which commands national attention.

NOTES

1. Advertisement for Elliot's Tavern, Rochester **Telegraph**, September 29, 1818.
2. **Records of the Doings of the Trustees of the Village of Rochester**, 1817-22.
3. W. Earl Weller, "The Expanding Charter Life of Rochester," Rochester Historical Society **Publication Fund Series**, Vol. XII (1933), pp. 61-65.
4. **Records of the Doings and Votes of the Inhabitants of Rochester**, 1817-24.
5. Weller, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-70; Jesse Hatch, "Memories of Village Days," **RHS Publications**, Vol. IV (1925), pp. 235-247.
6. Dorothy S. Truesdale, "Historic Main Street Bridge," **Rochester History**, Vol. III (April, 1941), No. 2, pp. 1-5.
7. **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Monroe County**, October 1, 1822.
8. **Records...of the Trustees of the Village...**, May, 1822, April 1, 3, 28, 1823.
9. **Records...of the Inhabitants...**, December 11, 1823.
10. **Directory of the Village of Rochester** (1827), pp. 123-124; Walter H. Cassebeer, "Architecture in Rochester," **RHS Publications**, Vol. XI (1932), pp. 275-277.
11. Blake McKelvey, **Rochester, The Water-Power City 1812-1854** (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), pp. 176, 184-186.
12. Weller, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-79.
13. William F. Peck, **Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester** (Syracuse, 1884), p. 129.
14. Rochester **Daily Democrat**, January 4, 1837. "Macadamizing" and flagstone sidewalks were high on the city's agenda and viewed with satisfaction by the editorialist cited, who refers to the "jocular" name, "city of mud."
15. **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors**, October 16, 1834.
16. *Ibid.*, October 16, 1835.

17. Henry O'Reilly, **Sketches of Rochester** (Rochester, 1838), starred p. 377.
18. **Proceedings of the Common Council** 1838, pp. 102-103.
19. **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors**, October 12, 1836, December 5, 1837, McKelvey, "Rochester and Monroe County, An Historic Partnership," **Rochester History**, Vol. XXXIII (April, 1971), No. 2, pp. 10-11.
20. **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors**, December 7, 1841.
21. Unidentified newspaper clipping dated 1846, **Raymond Scrapbook**, p. 16, Rochester Public Library.
22. **Ibid.**
23. McKelvey, **Water-Power City**, p. 335; Peck, **op. cit.**, p. 141. Sources differ as to exact figures, but the city's share was substantially larger than the county's.
24. **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors**, March 27, October 16, 1850.
25. **RDD**, October 22, 1853.
26. **RDD**, December 21, 1853.
27. **Proceedings of the Common Council**, June 5, 1856, March 31, 1857.
28. Donald W. Gilbert, "The Government and Finances of Rochester, New York" (MS Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1930), Table I.
29. The supervisors' meetings, which lasted no more than a few days in the pioneer '20s, lengthened to a month and a half by 1871. The county's annual tax levy increased from \$101,000 in 1851 to \$457,000 in 1871. **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors.**
30. Charles M. Robinson, **First Church Chronicles 1815-1915** (Rochester, 1915), pp. 146-150; **Proceedings of the Common Council**, June 15, 1869, September 20, 1870.
31. **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors**, June 2, 1869, January, 18, 25, 1871.
32. **Proceedings of the Common Council**, January 4, 1872; **Rochester Union and Advertiser**, June 15, 16, 27, October 18, 19, November 8, 1871.
33. McKelvey, Rochester, **The Flower City 1855-1890** (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), pp. 134-135.
34. Peck, **Semi-Centennial History**, p. 163.
35. The architecture of A. J. Warner's city hall is discussed in Susanne K. Maruoka, "The Architecture of Andrew Jackson Warner," **RHS Publications**, Vol. XXV (1972), pp. 34-38.
36. **U&A**, December 21, 1895, July 11, 1896.
37. **Proceedings of the Common Council**, December 12, 1871; **Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors**, December 15, 1871.
38. R. H. Thayer, **Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department** (Washington, D.C., 1886), p. 1.
39. **Ibid.**, p. 46.
40. Mifflin E. Bell, "The National Building Question," **Proceedings of the American Institute of Architects**, 1887, p. 94.
41. Supervising Architect to the Secretary of the Treasury, **Annual Report**, 1884, 1885, 1886.
42. Drawings in Binder One, U.S.C.H.P.O. & etc., Rochester, N.Y., Cartographic Archives Division, National Archives.

43. Bell, *op. cit.*, 100-101; Supervising Architect, **Annual Report**, 1875, 1889, 1893; Thayer, **Office of the Supervising Architect**, pp. 38-43; George N. Lamphere, **The United States Government: Its Organization and Practical Workings** (Philadelphia, 1881), pp. 72-75. Oscar Knebel succeeded Charles Ellis as the superintendent of construction for the Rochester federal building. **The Industries of the City of Rochester** (1888), p. 64.
44. Goodspeed Publishing Company, **Industrial Chicago: The Building Interests**, Vol. 1 (Chicago, 1891), pp. 605-606; **Construction News**, Vol. XVII (June 4, 1904), No. 23; **American Architect and Building News** Vol. LXXXIV (June 18, 1904) No. 1486.
45. **Industrial Chicago**, p. 606.
46. *Ibid.*, 606-607; Supervising Architect, **Annual Report**, 1884-1887; **Lakeside (Commercial) Directory of Chicago**, 1889-1905; **Inland Architect and News Record** Vol. XII (September, 1888), No. 2, Vol. XIII (February, 1889), No. 13, Vol. XIV (September, 1889), No. 24; **Chicago Tribune**, October 27, 1889, pt. 2, p. 10, May 1, 1892, pt. 2, p. 31. As Superintendent of Government Buildings in Chicago in 1891, Mifflin Bell was peripherally involved in planning and construction for the World's Columbian Exposition. Daniel H. Burnham, **Final Official Report of the Director of Works of the World's Columbian Exposition**, (8 Vol. Ms in Burnham Library, Chicago Institute of Art), Vol. 1, pp. 9, 13; U.S. House of Representatives, 52nd Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 1454: **World's Fair Expenditures**, pp. 501-503, "Testimony of M. E. Bell."
47. M. E. Bell rendering for "U.S. Court House, Post Office, & etc. Rochester, N.Y.," **American Architect and Building News** Vol. XX (September 18, 1886), pl. 560; **U&A**, September 4, 1890.
48. Drawings #90, 108, U.S.C.H.P.O. & etc., Rochester, N.Y., Cartographic Archives Division. Similar attention to interior woodwork is apparent in the Theodore F. Rice House (now the Jesuit School of Theology) constructed in 1892 and the one extant Chicago residence by Bell.
49. **U&A**, September 9, 1885, September 4, 1890, March 23, 1891, Rochester **Post-Express**, March 29, 1891.
50. **Rochester Guide Book** (1911), p. 45.
51. Rochester **Democrat and Chronicle**, November 28, 1937, November 6, 1938.
52. Rochester **Times-Union**, March 11, 1965, March 19, 1970; **D&C**, September 20, 1972.
53. McKelvey, "A History of City Planning in Rochester," **Rochester History**, Vol. VI (October, 1944), No. 4; pp. 3-18.
54. **T-U**, August 30, 1971, November 21, 1972, January 15, 1973; **D&C**, October 6, 1972.
55. **T-U**, August 28, 1969, February 2, 1973; **D&C**, August 1, 1972.