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Rochester's Congressmen

Part I 1789-1869

By Joseph W. Barnes

A member of the House of Representatives occupies a unique position. Although candidacy for office is the result of local party selection, congressmen pursue legislative activities at the national level. However, the districts they represent are not fixed and are created at an intermediate government level. Following each decennial census, which determines the allotment of representatives for each state, the state legislature sets the boundaries of congressional districts, increasing or decreasing their size to achieve rough parity (and often adjusting their shape to the advantage of party interests).

The earliest districts for this region were vast, but because of the rapid settlement of western New York and growth in population of the state as a whole, the legislature presently created smaller districts. A true "Rochester district" appeared in 1822, when a new 27th Congressional District was established which encompassed the (likewise newly created)

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Counties of Livingston and Monroe. The first representative *from* Rochester to serve this district was Daniel D. Barnard, elected in 1826.

Rochester would not obtain its first city charter until 1834; it had been settled in 1812. This series of biographical sketches begins with an even earlier date for the sake of completeness. At the beginning of the national government in 1789 the Genesee country was represented, if remotely. The individuals in the vanguard of congressmen who sat for territory which included the site of Rochester are of more than passing interest.

The ambition of this series is to summarize the lives and careers of congressmen, not to examine their politics or effectiveness in the House of Representatives. A little of that information can, however, be inferred from the spare biographical facts. Not surprisingly, most of our congressmen were lawyers, or lawyer-politicians, but even within that category they displayed a fascinating diversity.

JEREMIAH VAN RENSSELAER (1738-1810) served in the First Congress (1789-1791), representing New York's enormous 6th District. It included all the territory in Albany, Montgomery, and Ontario Counties, then comprising at least half the state's area. Van Rensselaer was educated at the manor house "Rensselaerswyck" and graduated from Princeton. His involvement in political affairs began during the Revolution when he served on the Albany Committee of Safety. After the war, his political interests took an unexpected turn — for a Van Rensselaer. As chairman of the Anti-federal committee during the state convention campaign he led Albany County's opposition to the proposed constitution. He failed at re-election to Congress in 1790 and subsequently was a founder, later president, of the Bank of Albany. He was a Democratic elector in 1800 and served as lieutenant governor 1801-1804.

JAMES GORDON (1739-1810) was born in Ireland, the third son of a family of modest circumstances. At the age of 19, he sailed to New York with £100 worth of Irish goods to trade for flaxseed. He sent the flaxseed back, and stayed in America. His life was adventurous. During the French and Indian War he was a sutler for Rogers Rangers. As a full-time Indian trader between that war and the Revolution, he exchanged rum, lead, and powder for furs and peltry. In 1775 he settled down as a landowner and miller in the infant community of Ballston (marrying Mary, daughter of the Rev. Eliphalet Ball for whom the settlement was named). There he organized the revolutionary party, raised troops, and was commissioned Lieut. Colonel of the Half Moon and Ballston Regiment. In 1780 he was home with his wife and young daughter when a party of Tories and Indians under Major John Munro laid the town waste. Gordon was taken prisoner and held captive in Montreal and Quebec, but he escaped, made his way through the Maine forests, and reached Boston about the time that peace was declared. He served in the state assembly 1777-1780, 1786, and 1790, and in the state senate 1797-1804; he actively campaigned for legislation to establish a college in Schenectady and served as one of the original trustees of Union College. As a member of the Second and Third Congresses (1791-1795), he represented the 10th District of New York, which in the 1790s included Herkimer, Ontario, Montgomery, Otsego, and Tioga Counties. Gordon was a Federalist.

WILLIAM COOPER (1754-1809), founder of Cooperstown and father of the illustrious James Fenimore Cooper, represented the 10th District in the Fourth Congress (1795-1797) and again in the Sixth (1799-1801). Cooper was a prototypical Federalist squire. his house, Otsego Hall, was said to be the finest west of Albany; "I have settled more acres than any other man in America" was his boast. His purchase of 29,000 acres at 50 cents an acre demonstrated acumen in dealing with the state legislature, and his even-handed treatment of his tenantry — permitting purchase of

land by installments, for example, and accepting payments in kind — was a source of popularity. "Judge" Cooper (he was appointed first judge of the court of common pleas in Otsego County in 1791) could also exhibit considerable temper. In Burlington, New Jersey his wife Elizabeth Fenimore refused to prepare for the journey to their new home in upstate New York. She sat placidly in a rocker, baby in her arms. Cooper lifted wife, chair, and infant into a wagon. He died in Albany after being struck from behind by a political opponent.

JAMES COCHRAN (1769-1848) was a member of the Fifth Congress (1797-1799). He was born in Albany, graduated from Columbia, studied law, and was commissioned a major in the army. In 1796 he attended festivities at Geneva in connection with the launching of the sloop *Alexander* on Seneca Lake. Thousands of western New Yorkers gathered at this signal event. Young Major Cochran, whose talents included those of an amateur fiddler, was persuaded to play during the evening for a young peoples' dance. He caught the attention of the gentlemen present, one of whom declared, "He is fit for Congress!" At least, this was the recollection of Cochran, who always maintained that he had "fiddled my way into Congress." Cochran also served as a Regent of the University of New York (1796-1820), as a state senator (1814-1818), and as postmaster of Oswego (1841-1845). In later life he was editor of the Oswego *Democratic Gazette*.

THOMAS MORRIS (1771-1849), son of the famous and wealthy Robert Morris who "financed" the Revolution, became connected with western New York through his father's land speculations here. The elder Morris, in 1790, bought the unsold portion of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and sold most of it to the British Pulteney Associates in 1792. His son, who had been born in Philadelphia, educated abroad, and instructed in the law in his native city, traveled at this time to Canandaigua, in part to look after the family interests. He was admitted to the bar and began legal practice in Canandaigua, but was presently elected as a Federalist to the state assembly (1794-1796) and to the Seventh Congress

(1801-1803). The district for western New York, now designated the 17th, included Cayuga, Ontario, and Steuben Counties: roughly all the land west of Skaneateles Lake, except Tioga County. After his single term at Washington, young Morris took up residence in New York City, where he served for a number of years as United States Marshal for the Southern District.

OLIVER PHELPS (1749-1809), the active member of the land company that negotiated the first great purchase of Indian lands in the Genesee country, participated in the region's settlement and represented it in the Eighth Congress (1803-1805). Phelps was born in Connecticut. He became a successful merchant in Massachusetts, served as an army commissary during the Revolution, and after the war held a variety of state political posts. The connections he thus established aided his efforts in forming the Phelps and Gorham syndicate. Phelps journeyed west to supervise land surveys and to arrange acceptable terms with the Senecas for the purchase of the eastern half of their lands. Within a year or two after conclusion of the Phelps and Gorham Purchase the company was bankrupt; land sales did not keep pace with payments due Massachusetts for the pre-emption rights. Phelps, however, who retained extensive holdings in the infant Ontario County, maintained an interest in its affairs — and in further land speculations. He was elected First Judge of Ontario county (1789-1793). After additional entanglements in western real estate ventures which resulted in "personal embarrassment" and, for a time, the prospect of debtor's prison, Phelps settled down to permanent residence in Canandaigua in 1802. A popular figure in the country he had opened for settlement, he was honored as a Democrat (*i.e.*, Jeffersonian Republican) with his single term in congress, and returned to Canandaigua afterwards to live out his years.

SILAS HALSEY (1743-1832), a native of Long Island, settled in territory which would become central Seneca County and combined the careers of a physician, miller, farmer, and politician. He attended public school in Southampton,

studied medicine in New Jersey, and spent several years during the Revolution in Connecticut. Afterwards he served as undersheriff and sheriff of Suffolk County. Finally, in 1793, he moved with his family to western New York, where, at Lodi, he established one of the pioneer grist mills. He also repeatedly won elections to the positions of town supervisor, clerk of the newly formed Seneca County (1804), and state assemblyman. He served a single term as representative in the Ninth Congress (1805-1807), and concluded his political career as state senator for one term (1808-1809). Halsey was a Democrat, as were his sons Jehiel and Nicoll, both of whom pursued successful public lives in Seneca and Tompkins Counties and were also elected to congress.

JOHN HARRIS (1760-1824), a pioneer like Halsey, laid claims as the first settler of Aurelius, first storekeeper, first tavern-keeper, first person (with his wife) to contract marriage in the town, and first operator of a ferry on Cayuga Lake. His seat in the Tenth Congress (1807-1809) was apparently his only elective office. Harris was born at Harris Ferry (Harrisburg), Pennsylvania, and moved to Aurelius in 1789. In 1806 he was appointed colonel in the New York State militia; in the War of 1812 he commanded a regiment. Harris may well have been among those veterans of the Sullivan-Clinton Campaign (1779) whose favorable impressions of the Genesee country influenced them to move here; a John Harris, private, appears in the roster of the Eleventh Pennsylvania Regiment, which accompanied Sullivan.

PETER B. PORTER (1773-1844), one of the leading citizens of western New York, served in the Eleventh and Twelfth Congresses (1809-1813), and during part of the Fourteenth (1815-resigned 1816). During his first two terms, he represented a newly defined 15th District, which included Niagara, Genesee, and Ontario counties. Porter was a native of Connecticut who graduated from Yale, studied law, and commenced practice in Canandaigua (a little later than Thomas Morris). He served as Ontario County Clerk for a number of years, and was elected to the state assembly. In



Thomas Kempshall

1805 he and his brother Augustus along with others formed a company which contracted for the purchase of mill sites at Niagara Falls and engaged in milling and freighting. During his first year in Congress (1809) Porter shifted his residence to Buffalo. In Congress he was a leader of the western "War Hawks" who sought war with Britain for the purpose of conquering Canada. Preferring military service to campaigning for re-election in 1812, Porter served as a major general of volunteers at the battles of Chippewa, Niagara, and Erie. He resigned during his third term in Congress to become New York secretary of state. He was defeated by DeWitt Clinton in the election for governor in 1817. Porter served briefly in the cabinet of John Quincy Adams as Secretary of War (1828-1829) during which time he advocated removal of the Indians beyond the Mississippi.

NATHANIEL W. HOWELL (1770-1851), a Canandaigua lawyer who was elected to the Thirteenth Congress (1813-1815), was closely connected to Porter by family and career. Howell was born in Orange County, graduated from Princeton, and, after conducting an academy in Montgomery, New York from 1789 to 1792, studied law. He began practice in Canandaigua at the same time as Peter B. Porter. At the first jury trial in Ontario County, convened on the matter of a stolen cow bell, Nathaniel Howell prosecuted the case and Porter was a defense attorney. Augustus Porter, Peter's elder brother, married Howell's sister. Howell was attorney general for western New York 1799-1802, was once elected state assemblyman, and was appointed First Judge of Ontario County on the nomination of Governor DeWitt Clinton, a post at which he served 1819-1832.

MICAH BROOKS (1775-1857), of East Bloomfield near Canandaigua, was elected to the Fourteenth Congress (1815-1817) along with Peter B. Porter, to represent New York's 21st District. As a result of the federal census of 1810, New York's apportionment increased from 17 to 27 representatives. Unable to entirely agree on new district lines, the state legislature left the number of districts at 21; some con-

gressmen were elected at large, and District 21 became a kind of "double district" until 1821 when new counties were formed. Micah Brooks, representing the eastern portion, was a native of Connecticut, a pioneer who settled East Bloomfield in 1799. He served as a local justice of the peace and briefly as a state assemblyman. During the War of 1812 he attained the rank of colonel (after the war he was named a major general). A yeoman farmer for much of his life, Brooks died in Allegany County and was buried in Nunda.

ARCHIBALD S. CLARKE (1788-1821) was elected to fill Peter B. Porter's vacancy in the Fourteenth Congress (1816-1817). A native of Maryland, Clarke practiced law in Niagara county as a young man, and served, during his brief life, as surrogate, state assemblyman, county clerk, and state senator.

JOHN C. SPENCER (1788-1855), another member of that able group of early Canandaiguan lawyers who won wide recognition, was a Democratic representative in the Fifteenth Congress (1817-1819). He was born in Hudson, New York, graduated from Union College with high honors, and began the practice of law in Canandaigua in 1809. Subsequent to service in the War of 1812 he was made postmaster of Canandaigua and attorney general for western New York. After his single term in Congress he was elected numerous times to the state legislature, but his most important state posts were special attorney general in the William Henry Morgan affair and secretary of state. He held two national cabinet posts: Secretary of War (1841-1843) and Secretary of the Treasury (1843-1844). The hanging of his son aboard the brig *Somers* for attempted mutiny while Spencer was Secretary of War was a bitter tragedy. In 1842 he helped bring about the "compromise treaty of Buffalo Creek" overturning an earlier treaty which would have deprived the Senecas of their reservations in New York.

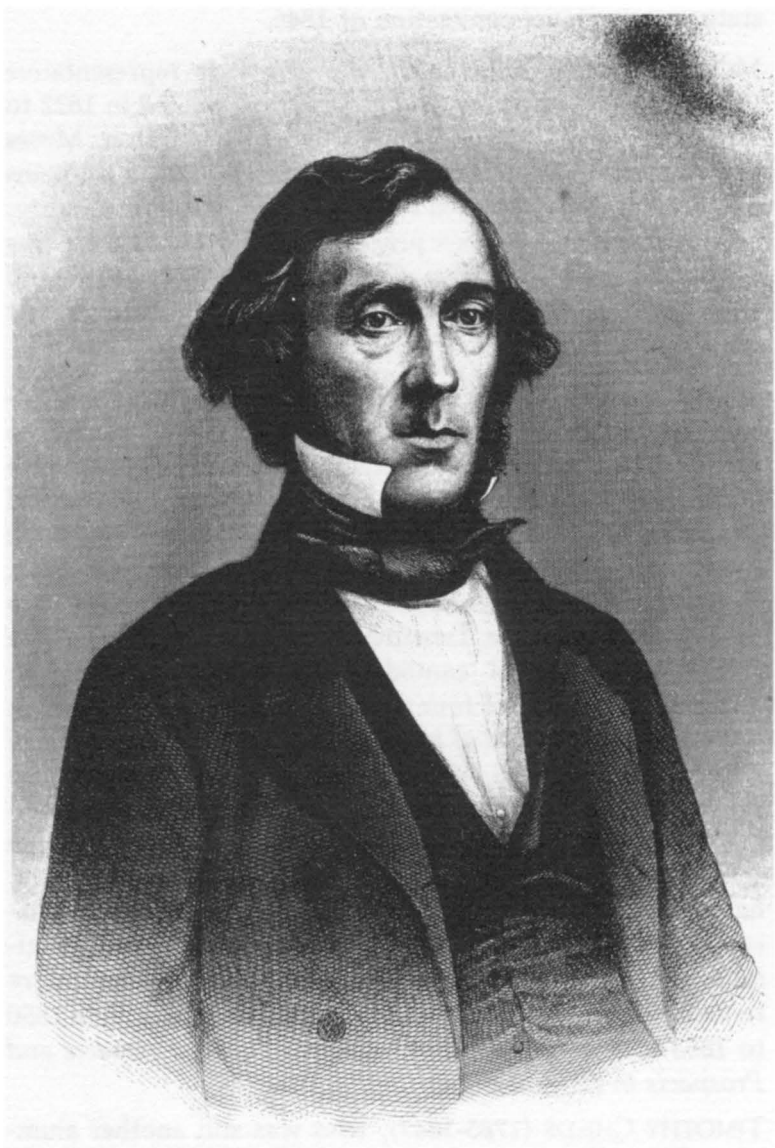
BENJAMIN ELLICOTT (1765-1827), a native of Maryland, was brother of Joseph Ellicott, the surveyor and agent for the Holland Land Company. Benjamin was also a surveyor; one of his noteworthy accomplishments was to

help establish a new pre-emption line on the eastern bounds of the Pulteney lands. He became an extensive landowner and a resident of Batavia, served as a Genesee County judge, and was elected as a Democrat to the Fifteenth Congress (1817-1819).

NATHANIEL ALLEN (1780-1832) and his father and brother were among the pioneers of Ontario County, settling Allen's Hill in the Town of Richmond in 1796 and 1797. Nathaniel learned the art of blacksmithing and operated shops in Canandaigua and in Richmond. He was a postmaster of Honeoye Falls, a state assemblyman, Sheriff of Ontario County, and Supervisor of the Town of Richmond. He served a single term as representative, in the Sixteenth Congress (1819-1821).

ALBERT H. TRACY (1793-1859) was born and raised in Connecticut where he studied medicine. Abandoning medicine, he commenced practicing law in Buffalo in 1815. He was elected to the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Congresses (1819-1825). Only during the first two of his three congressional terms was he a representative of the Genesee country (or of Ontario Country). Tracy declined a judgeship offered by Governor DeWitt Clinton and a position in the cabinet of John Q. Adams. He served in the state senate during the 1830s, was unsuccessful in a candidacy for the U.S. Senate, and refused another cabinet position, offered by President John Tyler. Tracy was the last of the representatives from Buffalo to represent Rochester and its surrounding territory as part of the doubled 21st Congressional District.

ELIJAH SPENCER (1775-1852), who served in the Seventeenth Congress (1821-1823), resided in the opposite corner of the district. He was born in Columbia County but migrated west to become a pioneer-farmer in the Town of Benton. Until the formation of Yates County in 1823, Benton was located in the southern portion of Ontario County. Spencer was town supervisor for a number of years before his term in Congress, was once sent to the state assembly, and to the



Azariah Boody

state constitutional convention of 1846.

MOSES HAYDEN (1786-1830) was the first representative elected in the 27th Congressional District, created in 1822 to take in the new Counties of Monroe and Livingston. Moses Hayden was a Massachusetts native and graduate of Williams College. He was appointed First Judge of Livingston County, where he had begun a law practice at York, in 1821. He was elected to two successive Congresses, the Eighteenth and Nineteenth (1823-1827). Hayden died in Albany during a first term as state senator.

DANIEL DEWEY BARNARD (1797-1861), the first congressman sent to Washington from Rochester, was a credit to the nascent city. He was a native of Connecticut, and, like Moses Hayden, was a Williams alumnus who studied law and sought his fortune in the Genesee country. Barnard joined the small galaxy of lawyers in the new Monroe County in 1821. Four years later he became prosecuting attorney, and in 1826 he was elected to the Twentieth Congress (1827-1829). He was an unsuccessful candidate for re-election in 1828. Tragically, his wife of four years, Sara Livingstone, died in Washington at the end of his term, and Barnard journeyed to Europe. He travelled, wrote letters for publication in the Rochester press, and began work on a number of biographical and historical pamphlets which would earn him some small literary recognition. On returning to the United States, he took up residence in Albany, resumed counseling, remarried, and at last returned to political life. His Albany constituency elected him to the state assembly and to three more terms in Congress. He served as Minister to Prussia from 1850 to 1853 and after retirement authored *Political Aspects and Prospects in Europe* (1854).

TIMOTHY CHILDS (1785-1847), who was still another alumnus of Williams, also practiced law in the newly formed Monroe County and served, for a number of years, as district attorney. He came from Pittsfield, Massachusetts. His father, Timothy C. Childs, had been a Revolutionary War surgeon

and was said to be the most prominent physician in western Massachusetts. During the '20s Childs fell in with the Antimasonic enthusiasm. He was sent to the state assembly in 1827 as an Antimason and the following year was elected to his first term in Congress, the Twenty-first (1829-1831). In 1831 he was a delegate to the historic Antimasonic convention in Baltimore. He won three more terms as a Whig representative in the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Congresses (1835-1839) and in the Twenty-seventh (1841-1843). He died during the concluding months of the Mexican War on board the vessel *Emily* at Vera Cruz.

FREDERICK WHITTLESEY (1799-1851), scion of a distinguished Connecticut family which traced its arrival in America to 1635 (and its roots to Whittlesea, England), served as Rochester's representative in the Twenty-second and Twenty-third Congresses (1831-1835). A precocious student, he graduated from Yale in 1818. He studied law at the Litchfield, Connecticut Law School, in apprenticeship with a firm in Albany, and with a relative, Robert Campbell, in Cooperstown. Whittlesey was admitted to the bar at Utica, in 1821. After practicing briefly in Cooperstown, he assumed permanent residence in Rochester. Whittlesey hitched his fortunes to the Antimasonic, and later Whig, comet; in fact he named one of his sons Thurlow Weed, another William Seward. Before serving in Congress he was elected to a term as treasurer of Monroe County. After his four years as representative he resumed his law practice, became city attorney, and finally was appointed vice-chancellor for the judicial district. He was a supreme court justice in 1847-1848 and a professor of law at Genesee College 1850-1851. In the last years of his life, the Whittlesey family occupied the Greek revival mansion built by Benjamin Campbell, who had by then moved to Buffalo. After Frederick Whittlesey's death, the house was purchased by his daughter. In 1832, during Whittlesey's first term, the state legislature again adjusted the district lines; a new 28th District was created out of Monroe County alone. This action recognized the growth of Rochester in population

and importance. The city charter was granted during Wittlesey's second term.

THOMAS KEMPSHALL (1796-1865), who was born in England and emigrated with his father to Pittsford in 1806, relieved Timothy Childs of his duties as representative in the Twenty-sixth Congress (1839-1841). He was not a lawyer. Kempshall learned carpentering and at the age of 17 helped build one of the first mills at Rochester. He became a merchant miller and well respected businessman, was active in village affairs, and served among the original city aldermen. In 1837 he was named mayor. Apparently because of growing anti-foreign sentiment he was less successful in politics later in life; he lost two mayoralty elections in the '50s.

THOMAS J. PATTERSON (1805-1885) was a native of Lisle, near Binghamton. His grandfather was the revolutionary General John Patterson, the hero of the battle of Monmouth. About 1812, when Thomas was a boy, his father Josiah moved the family to Parma. The lad was boarded with relatives in Rochester and attended district school two winters. Despite such limited educational opportunities, Patterson learned mercantile skills in apprenticeship with Bissell & Ely and by 1827 was a successful merchant himself. In partnership with others he became heavily involved in a milling enterprise which was smashed in the Panic of 1837. A sympathetic obituarist observed that afterwards, "Mr. P. never was able fully to disentangle and settle his business affairs." Patterson, now a life-long debtor, had been an active Whig. His political associates helped elect him to the board of supervisors in 1838 (his only elective office before becoming a congressman). He lost an aldermanic election in 1840, but in 1842 he won election as a representative in the Twenty-eighth Congress (1843-1845). In later life he was a real estate agent.

ELIAS B. HOLMES (1807-1966), the Whig representative for Monroe County in the Twenty-ninth and Thirtieth Congresses (1845-1849), was a prominent Brockport businessman. He was a native of Vermont, where he attended the St. Albans Academy. He studied law in Pittsford and began a



Samuel G. Andrews

practice in Brockport in 1831. He was also a farmer, and owner of the "Opposition Line" canal packets. He promoted the Niagara Falls branch of the New York Central Railroad, originally the Rochester and Niagara Falls Railroad, of which he was a director. He played an active role in the affairs of the Brockport Collegiate Institute (later the normal school and unit of the State University of New York).

ABRAHAM M. SCHERMERHORN (1791-1855), was known as one of the wealthiest men in early Rochester. He was born in Schenectady and graduated from Union College in 1810. He began a law practice in Rochester at a very early date, 1813, and in 1824 was a prominent partner of Nathaniel Rochester and others in founding the Bank of Rochester. Later he opened his own Bank of Monroe, which closed when its charter expired in 1849. Schermerhorn grew wealthy through banking and through investment in railroads. He served briefly as mayor in 1837, resigning to accept the more lucrative post of secretary to the state senate. He was also a member of the assembly (1848) before election as a Whig to the Thirty-first and Thirty Second Congresses (1849-1853). Schermerhorn supplied capital for the construction of the Eagle Tavern at the Four Corners in 1830, which Daniel Powers later used as a nucleus for his block.

AZARIAH BOODY (1815-1885) has been known to generations of University of Rochester students for his "sleek and noble kine" (memorialized in a college song). He was elected to the Thirty-third Congress in 1852 but resigned the next year, before its convening. Boody was born in Quebec, migrated with his parents to Lowell, Massachusetts, and arrived in Rochester in 1850, at the time of the university's founding. He became a university trustee (1853-1865) having donated eight acres of what was then known as "Pitkins Woods" for a campus. It is the land now occupied by the Memorial Art Gallery, Cutler Union, and Anderson Hall. Boody's cows were not removed for the construction of Anderson Hall, as the song would have it, since their owner moved to New York City in 1855, years before the new

"home for knowledge" was commenced. Boody's interest in higher education was first directed toward women; as president of the trustees of the Barleywood Female University he had offered the eight acres of "verdant field" to that evanescent institution. His gift to the university was not unencumbered. Along with the eight acres went seventeen more at \$1,000 per acre, a fairly good price for the time. In New York City Boody engaged in the construction of railroads, canals, and bridges; he was a president of the Wabash Railroad.

DAVIS CARPENTER (1799-1878), a native of Walpole, New Hampshire, graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont. He studied both law and medicine and was a practicing attorney in Brockport when he was elected to fill Azariah Boody's vacancy in the Thirty-third Congress (1853-1855). He was a Whig. His unsuccessful candidacy for re-election in 1854 interrupted the long hold his party had on the district. After his single term as congressman he became a physician in Brockport, where he died.

JOHN WILLIAMS (1807-1875), like Thomas Kempshall, was a merchant miller and mayor of Rochester before entering Congress. He was born in Utica, grew up in Sackets Harbor, and arrived in Rochester in 1824 as a miller's apprentice. His fortunes improved through partnership with the prominent miller Warham Whitney, whose daughters he successively married. He gained recognition and popularity through local militia activities. He organized the William's Light Infantry and eventually rose to the rank of major general in the state guard. At the outbreak of the Civil War he organized the 140th Volunteers, whose command he turned over to Col. Patrick O'Rourke. Williams served as an alderman in 1844 and as mayor in 1853. He was the Democratic candidate for Congress in 1854 despite his sympathy for fugitive slaves. But antislavery leanings along with his

popularity helped win him a place in the Thirty-fourth Congress (1855-1857). After Civil War duties of a "home guard" nature Williams served as excise commissioner, manager of the House of Refuge, and finally, city treasurer.

SAMUEL G. ANDREWS (1796-1863), was Rochester's first Republican congressman. Like Kempshall and Williams, he was also a former mayor. Andrews was of Thurlow Weed's generation. His friendship with Weed and his early participation in Antimasonic, Whig, and Republican conclaves won him a large number of political posts. Andrews was a native of Connecticut, where he attended district schools and a classical academy in Chester. After migrating to Rochester with his parents, he engaged in the mercantile and milling businesses. With considerable utility, he occupied the positions of clerk of the assembly (1831-1832); clerk of Monroe County (1834-1837); alderman (1838); mayor (1840, 1856); secretary of the state senate (1840-1841); clerk of the court of errors; Rochester postmaster (1842-1845); and president of the board of education (1849). The capstone of his career was election to the Thirty-fifth Congress (1857-1859).

ALFRED ELY (1815-1892), became one of the most famous of Rochester's nineteenth century representatives, for the ignominious reason of his capture and imprisonment by the Confederates. Ely was a native of Connecticut, where he attended Bacon Academy. He moved to Rochester in 1835 and was admitted to the bar in 1841. He gradually built a substantial fortune, for the most part as a lawyer for the milling industry. Ely was first named Republican candidate for Congress in 1858 and served in the Thirty-sixth and Thirty-seventh Congresses (1859-1863). He had little prior political experience but possessed sound Republican principles regarding the extension of slavery. Along with others witnessing the Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861, Ely fell behind the Union



Freeman Clarke

rout. When discovered by Confederate soldiers, he declared, "I am the Honorable Alfred Ely, Representative in Congress from New York." A Confederate replied: "You white-livered Yankee, you're just the cuss I have been looking for, get on my horse next to me!" The South was gratified to have captured this specimen of "black Republican" and held him in a tobacco warehouse in Richmond until Christmas. His release was delayed in part because of uncertainty about Union treatment of the crew of the privateer *Savannah* (and other southern captives) as common criminals. At last he was exchanged for Charles L. Faulkner, a former Minister to France. Ely was not a candidate for renomination in 1862.

FREEMAN CLARKE (1809-1887), a highly successful banker, represented Monroe County in the Thirty-eighth Congress (1863-1865), and in the Forty-second and Forty-third (1871-1875). Clarke was a native of Troy. In 1827 he ventured to Albion in Orleans County bringing with him a large stock of goods purchased on credit. The young merchant prospered, and in ten years was elected cashier of the Bank of Orleans. Before that, he married Henrietta Ward, daughter of Levi Ward, Jr., of Rochester. In 1845 he moved to Rochester where he soon became an officer of Monroe Savings Bank, Monroe County Bank, and the Rochester Bank. He helped promote regional railroad companies and was an early investor in companies later consolidated in Western Union. Although Clarke was a director of several New York City banks as well as local ones, he maintained his Rochester base. A Democrat early in life (until the Panic of 1837 damaged many fortunes), he assumed an active role in Whig, and later Republican, affairs. His first public office was elector on the Fremont and Dayton ticket in 1856. Clarke's first election to Congress was in 1862, a highly critical year in the nation's history. In 1864 he lost a bid for renomination to Roswell Hart, a more "radical Republican" candidate. It was a tumultuous time. In 1865 Clarke accepted

appointment as comptroller of the currency, and during the next two years rendered highly valuable service in that capacity. During his administration a new currency act liquidated many state banks out of existence and compelled all banks to invest in government securities. These measures helped check the post-war inflation by restoring confidence. While the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson was in progress, party leaders considered Clarke a likely Secretary of the Treasury in a new administration. Although a conservative advocate of the city's (and the nation's) business interests, Clarke was an effective and well-regarded congressman during his second and third terms. The Clarke household was one of the city's most socially prominent. The old mansion, on the east side of Alexander Street between Monroe and East Avenues, was purchased by Homeopathic (later Genesee) Hospital.

ROSWELL HART (1824-1883), was the first congressman from Rochester born here. His father of the same name settled in Rochester about 1815. Young Roswell had good educational opportunities and graduated from Yale in 1843, at the age of 19. Although he studied for law and was admitted to the bar, he preferred a commercial life. He opened Rochester's first retail coal yard. He also served as a director of Rochester Savings Bank and of the Citizens' Gas Company. Hart was well connected — one sister became Mrs. Mortimer Reynolds, another, Mrs. Henry Rochester — and he exhibited an enthusiasm for political life. He began as an ardent Clay Whig, later followed the American (Know-nothing) Party, and joined the Republican Party upon its formation. In the early part of the Civil War he held the post of provost marshal. Hart was known as a staunch Unionist and emerged the winner in a three-way factional contest with Ely and Clarke for nomination to Congress in 1864. His single term as representative in the Thirty-ninth Congress (1865-1867), gained him recognition in national party circles.

During the Grant administration he held the post of Superintendent of Railway Mail Service for New York and Pennsylvania. He also headed Rochester's Board of Water Commissioners which constructed the city's two water systems in the 1870s.

LEWIS SELYE (1803-1883), a blacksmith who became a prosperous manufacturer, was Rochester's Independent representative in the Fortieth Congress (1867-1869). Selye was born and raised in Chittenango, New York, where he learned smithing. He migrated to Rochester in 1824, setting up his forge first on the south side of Main Street just west of the river, later on Mill Street near the main falls. Here he began the manufacture of iron implements of various kind and finally established a fire engine factory which achieved national reknown. Selye eventually owned a complex of factory buildings at the Mill Street-Furnace Street intersection. He soon tired of manufacturing and discovered a taste for politics. He was elected several times to the board of supervisors and to the common council. Because of a reputation for honesty, Selye won several terms as Monroe County treasurer. He was known affectionately as a "diamond in the rough," often as "Old Broad Tire." The nickname applied not only to his physical dimensions but also to his policy while alderman and chairman of the city's Street Committee. Dismayed by the damage done to newly "MacAdamized" streets by heavy wagons, Selye repeatedly pressed for an ordinance required wide tires, but without success. He took pride in civic improvements, particularly the trees he planted and fenced in at his own expense along the length of Lake Avenue. Always something of a maverick, in 1866 Selye aspired to the congressional seat already held by Roswell Hart, a fellow Republican. Selye took the field as an Independent. The Democrats aided his quest by refraining from presenting a candidate, and Selye won by a sizeable margin. In Washington "Old Broad Tire" was soon on good terms with the



Roswell Hart

beleaguered President Johnson, whose toilsome background struck a sympathetic chord. Selye made money during the war, but lost much of it afterwards speculating in the volatile new commodity, petroleum. He was nearly ruined in another venture, the establishment of the *Rochester Chronicle*. Although the newspaper was praiseworthy, it was swallowed up in two years (for "less than a song," according to Selye) by the *Democrat*. During his active life Selye also held positions as trustee of Monroe Savings Bank and, for many years, as contractor for the repair of the Erie Canal between Buffalo and Syracuse.