

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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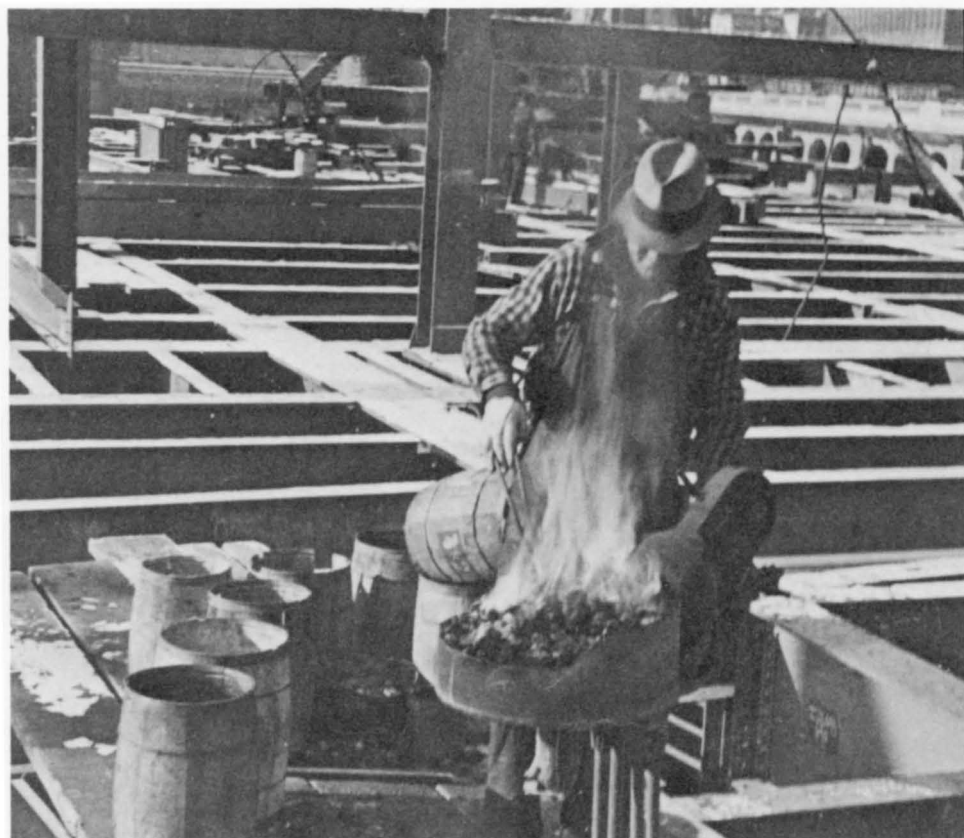
Nos. 1 and 2

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## The Origins of the Rochester Public Library

Rochester's Literary and Book Clubs by *Blake McKelvey*  
The Role of the Library by *Ruth Rosenberg-Naparstek*





LITERATURE & THE FINE ARTS.



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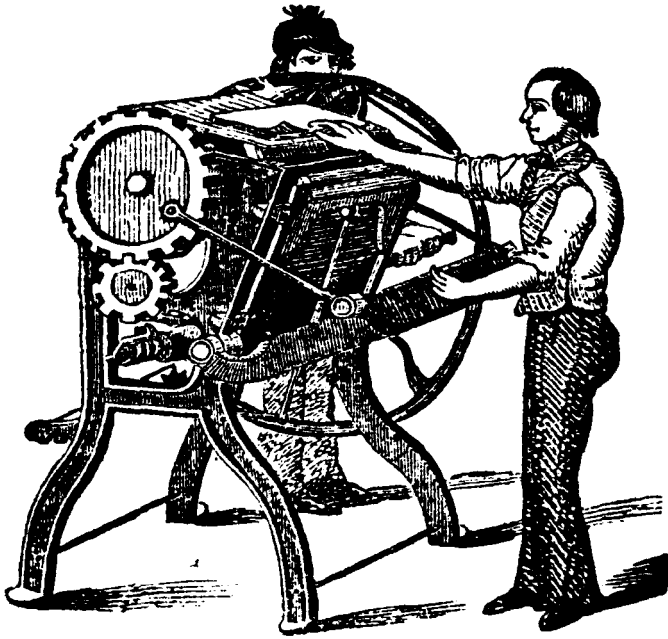
*The book collector's appreciation for fine books and fine bindings is longstanding in Rochester. (City Directory, 1855-56, Rochester Public Library.)*

*Cover: A construction worker begins work on the first level of the Rundel Memorial Building during the deepest depression in our country's history. (City Photo Lab.)*

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## Rochester's Literary and Book Clubs Their Origins, Programs and Accomplishments

*by Blake McKelvey*

One of my first discoveries as a student of Rochester's history was that next after a school and a church, the pioneer villages of the Genesee country almost without exception hastened to organize an association library. Books were cherished items in the carts of many migrating pioneers, and any journeyman printer with a hand-press and a font of type was assured a welcome. Before the public library was organized in Rochester these association libraries and book clubs were the centers of literary discussion and study. Their history is the history of the predecessor to the Rochester Public Library formed 75 years ago in 1911.

Rochester has had several specialized literary clubs, but its chief claim to distinction is the longevity of a few clubs that cultivated more diverse literary and intellectual interests. Two indeed have already celebrated their centennials, and two more are rapidly approaching

that anniversary—a maturity that few if any clubs elsewhere have attained. Moreover, the minute books and other records, including historical summaries of the club programs, that these and a few other clubs have placed on deposit in the university and public libraries, provide abundant evidence of the intellectual fermentation that fructified some of Rochester's more prosaic developments.

Again, Rochester was not alone, nor the pioneer in the generation of intimate literary clubs. Professor Arthur May, who in November 1967 compiled a summary account of the first thirty years of the Philosophers' Club of Rochester, located a model predecessor in industrial Birmingham where the Lunar Society had initiated a pattern and a rhythm for nightly gatherings of a select group that included such giants as James Watt, Joseph Priestly, Erasmus Darwin and John Baskerville the printer among a dozen other lovers of books. Since Professor May did not supply its date, I checked the excellent two-volume *History of Birmingham* (one of a half-dozen cities in the world that have published comprehensive historical accounts that rival those on Rochester). There we learn of the Lunar Society's origin in 1766 and its stimulating discussions continuing until the early 1800s when it was superseded by the larger Philosophical Society. There we also learn that "The inhabitants of Birmingham are fonder of associations in clubs than those of almost any other place. ...Many of the clubs were friendly societies...but unfortunately nearly all of them met in public houses, so that much liquor was consumed" and many of the clubs were soon liquidated.

Professor May also found a predecessor for his club in Benjamin Franklin's Leather Apron Club, soon renamed the Junto, whose debates on morals, politics and natural philosophy, as Franklin put it, "were to be conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth." Although the first Junto lapsed after a few years as its members became absorbed in the establishment and maintenance of a library, a Junto society was revived in the 1750s with a broader membership basis—a prototype for the philosophical societies that shortly appeared in Boston, New York and elsewhere. The library society formed by the original Junto also had its offsprings in the library associations that sprang up in towns throughout the country in the postrevolutionary years.

## 19th Century Clubs

There is no hint in the records that Lewis Henry Morgan, the prime mover in the establishment of Rochester's first literary club in 1854, had any knowledge of either the Junto or the Lunar Society. He had, however, benefited from the stimulation received from his associates in "The Grand Order of the Iroquois," a fraternity he had helped to organize among fellow students at Union College some fifteen years before. Its attempt to develop appropriate rituals had prompted him to undertake the first scientific study of that ancient tribe and had resulted in the publication of his first great book, *The League of the Iroquois*, in 1851. He was already pressing ahead with the study of the customs of other tribes, and the initiative he took in the establishment of "The Club" sprang from his hope of engendering friendly criticism for his researches from acute spokesmen of widely varied points of view. The Club, as he once described it, was to be an "intellectual fraternity."

Rochester, chartered as a city only twenty years before, a scant two decades after its founding, was already, with 40,000 inhabitants, the 21st city in size in the nation and the proud possessor of both a university and a theological seminary. The university's recently arrived president, Dr. Martin B. Anderson, and three of its professors (imported four years before by omnibus, together with a stack of books, from Madison, as Emerson was to describe the event) as well as two of the city's leading clergymen, two of Morgan's fellow barristers, each of whom had published a book, the editor of a local newspaper and Dr. Chester Dewey, the city's leading scientist and revered educator—all hastened to accept membership in The Club, which their wives soon characterized as the Pundit Club. Eight additional men accepted membership during the second visit—two more professors, two of the city's ablest physicians, another editor, another lawyer, and two more clergymen, bringing the total to seventeen, which remained its standard membership for many decades. No miller, merchant, banker or craftsman was included in this select circle.

For twelve years, Morgan as secretary issued a list of speaker-hosts for the successive fortnightly meetings, which were generally held in the host's dining room and library. Each member was scheduled to compose and read a paper on a subject of his choice, and the topics ranged widely, as intended, from E. Peshine Smith's initial paper on "The Gold Currency" in November 1854, to "The Relation of Insanity to Civilization" by Dr. Henry W. Dean a decade later. Morgan's successive annual papers provided a rough guide to the development of his theories concerning the laws of descent and systems of consanguinity

among the Indian tribes and among a widening range of human races as his researches progressed, culminating in his great books on Ancient Society. Dr. Anderson, like most of the other members, was more catholic in his interests, "taking all knowledge for his province," as Professor William C. Morey would later put it in his "Reminiscences of the Pundit Club." His papers on "The Origin and Dispersion of the Celtic Race," on "The Catacombs," "Serfdom" and "Trial by Jury" displayed an encyclopaedic rather than an analytic mind. The classical interests of most of the professors and of several other members commanded major attention for a number of decades in the club, which nurtured the output of several books in that field. Dr. Augustus H. Strong, president of the Theological Seminary, who held the record for club membership, 49 years, delivered papers on Browning, Dante, Homer, Vergil, Milton, Goethe and Shakespeare among other literary or philosophical writers but seldom approached the contemporary world.

Yet, despite the literary papers read by Dr. Strong, Judge Harvey Humphrey and others, and the classical studies contributed by Professors A.C. Kendrick and A.H. Mixer, the major intellectual ferment in the Club in the late sixties and seventies centered around the question of the Origin of the Species and the divergent theories of Agassiz, Darwin and Spencer. While the aging Dr. Dewey could not accept such infidelities, Dr. Edward Mott Moore, Dr. W.W. Ely and Dr. Dean displayed more receptivity in papers read before the Club. Morgan, who knew Agassiz and who visited Darwin and Spencer during his European trip in 1871, avoided taking a stand in the controversy but studied their writings carefully for implications on his own research.

As the controversy spilled over into the public press after the arrival of the Rev. Newton Mann at the Unitarian Church, Morgan responded to an appeal from Mann, Robert Matthews and others to lead the discussion in a newly formed Spencer Club in 1872. Its fortnightly sessions devoted to an intensive study of Spencer's works continued for successive winters until Morgan's death in 1881 when for another season the discussion focused on Morgan's own works.

Literary club associations and programs acquired a new diversity in the 1880s. Shakespeare, a frequent topic among the Pundits, had become the sole subject of Rochester's second literary society, organized in December 1865 in order to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the poet's death. The Shakespeare Society, unlike the intimate clubs we are chiefly concerned with, was open to all interested persons, and many of its lectures, readings of plays and stage performances were open to the public and supplied Rochesterians with intermittent opportunities for an enjoyment of the great masters throughout the next half-

century. A somewhat comparable Browning Club, which made its appearance in 1884, was more socially exclusive and acquired a solemn devotional atmosphere under the leadership of its hostess, Mrs. George W. Fisher. A less prestigious Spinoza Literary Society, formed by a group of Polish Jews in 1885, conducted periodic study sessions for several years. A Literary and Elocutionary Club organized in 1879 held monthly meetings for over two decades, generally reserving two or more sessions for the reading of poems or essays written by its active members. Perhaps the most unique club of the period was the Ignorance Club organized in 1880 by Jane Marsh Parker; it was the first women's literary club in the city and each member agreed to keep an ignorance book in which she would list queries to be submitted for study and enlightenment at the monthly club meetings.

Three clubs more closely patterned after the Pundit Club made their appearance in the eighties. The demise of the Spencer Club prompted several of its members to welcome a call by Charles E. Fitch, editor of the *Democrat*, to form a new club, which was duly established early in 1882 as the Fortnightly Club. Dr. Charles E. Dewey, son of the Pundit's Chester Dewey, was chosen secretary and a list of twelve members was prepared including a wider spread of occupations and interests than that of the Pundits. In addition to two physicians and two lawyers it enrolled three businessmen, two journalists and three clergymen of widely different faiths. Comprised, at least at the start, of a younger generation than the Pundits, their literary papers ventured more frequently into the 18th and 19th centuries, appraising Emerson and Carlyle, Schopenhauer, Shelley, Rousseau and even Zola among others. Although the controversy over evolution had now subsided, Robert Matthews, an avid Spencerian, would keep that position under scrutiny in successive papers for a dozen years despite the repeated protests of his fellow businessman, David B. Murphy, whose philanthropic spirits were outraged by Spencer's social determinism. Controversy was not lacking in the club, as Professor John R. Slater assures us in his historical review of the Fortnightly Club in 1948 where he records other sharp disagreements between Professor Henry F. Burton and Joseph T. Alling; between the Rev. Algernon Crapsey and Father Edward J. Hanna, which were always in the end muted, while Dewey, Rabbi Max Landsberg and President Rush Rhees preserved their intellectual objectivity and serenity, qualities which the young Slater admired and eventually acquired in full measure.

Not to be outdone, several of the ladies in St. Lukes and First Presbyterian churches met in October 1885 to form the Roundabout Club. The sixteen ladies who responded to the call by Mrs. David M. Hough

adopted a constitution (the first among the Rochester clubs) which declared that "Its object shall be the mutual improvement of its members in literature, art, science and the vital interests of the day." A special subject of study was announced for each year with topics related to it assigned to each member. Under the leadership of Mrs. Hough the first twelve years were devoted to a study of the history, literature and art of Italy, France, Spain, Germany, England and Scotland; after several more seasons on republics, rivers and islands, the club tackled a selected list of books each winter. Its membership increased to twenty with newcomers chosen from the daughters and daughters-in-law of the founders, and the Roundabout Club not only celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1935, but carried on for another two decades before the migration to the suburbs scattered its members and brought its dissolution.

A third club formed in the 1880s drew together together ten of the city's leading clergymen. Dr. William R. Taylor of Brick Church, one of a half-dozen relative newcomers to Rochester, took the lead in organizing a supper club in 1887. Alpha Chi, as it was named, increased its membership to fifteen by adding two professors of philosophy and three keenly interested laymen and in the course of two decades devoted 24 sessions to theology, 21 to science, 18 to sociology, 15 to ethics, 14 to biography, 12 to philosophy, 11 to religion and 9 to literature. With Dr. Taylor, Dr. Henry H. Stebbins, Professors George M. Forbes and Walter Rauschenbush as active members, it provided a stimulating intellectual vitality to the religious scene in Rochester throughout its thirty-five years.

Dr. William H. Gannett, who never joined the Alpha Chi, had his own Unity Club at the Unitarian Church. Though it sometimes numbered a hundred members and does not strictly fit into our category of clubs, Gannett's practice of dividing its members into small classes for the intensive study and reading of the works of Thoreau, Hawthorne, George Eliot, Lowell and Browning, and his social studies classes reading and debating the works of Bellamy, Ely, Spencer, Fisk and the Fabians, always under the tutelage of Dr. or Mrs. Gannett, entitles the Unity Club some notice. An ecstatic letter from Abram Lipsky in New York in 1920, regretting his absence from a reunion of the club in Rochester, recalls his "incredible luck" as a young man "in being allowed to swim within the sphere of influence of two such leaders...in the glorious company of the Unity Club."

Meanwhile, the 1890s had brought an even more diversified outburst of literary and book clubs. The Wednesday Club, the Tuesday Reading Club, and the American History Class, each destined for a



long life, all sprang into being in 1890, marking an upsurge of feminine intellectual activity.

The Wednesday Morning Club, initially organized by the wives and sisters of Fortnightly members, concentrated more deliberately in its early years on literary topics than any of the city's earlier clubs. Meeting every third Wednesday morning for hour-long readings and discussions of Emerson, George Eliot, Howells, Blake, Browning, Tolstoy, Longfellow and a host of other writers, provided a rich literary stimulation for the lunches that followed. But some of the women progressively enrolled in the club could not long content themselves with a second-hand literary approach to life's problems. Helen Barrett Montgomery, Mrs. Mary Gannett, Mrs. Joseph T. Alling, Mrs. Henry Danforth and several others of Rochester's most socially-minded women began reading papers on such topics as "Recent Municipal Reforms," "The Mission of the Liberal Thinker," "Women's Task Masters," "Women's Legal Rights in Various States" and other pressing issues. Indeed as the years passed the Wednesday Club, with an eye to the election of talented women from varied walks of life developed not only a warm intellectual fellowship for favored members of old families but served as an induction and training center for promising newcomers such as Mrs. Katherine Koller Dietz and Mrs. Garry Redding, bringing them into the main stream. An historical paper by Mrs. Alling marking its 50th anniversary and another by Mrs. Dorothy Compton on its 80th birthday add much to the city's historical record as well as to that of this continuing club.

The two other 1890 clubs long adhered to their original commitments. The American History Class formed that year by a number of young faculty wives under the inspiration of Professor Morey met periodically throughout the winter months of succeeding years for reports and discussions of their programmed studies. They carried on with new recruits as replacements, much as a postgraduate course, but under the independent management of successive presidents. Their probing study of American history soon required an exploration of the history of other countries, and as the years passed the History Class, as it is now known, tackled with unflagging enthusiasm topics of an increasingly specialized historical character, such as the current study of innovative women artists, the fourth year, as reported by its president, Mrs. Susan Schilling, devoted exclusively to women's history.

The Tuesday Reading Club, also launched in 1890, assembled a group of ladies eager to participate in the shared reading of selected books in the parlors of successive members. When, after a few years, interest flagged because some of the readers stumbled or failed to hold

their attention, the original club began to flounder, but one reader, Mrs. Elysabith Lyon Kidd whose skill as a trained dramatist in capturing the character and message of different poets and authors attracted a group of fascinated listeners who at the invitation of the Lyon sisters gathered on designated "Golden Tuesdays" in succeeding years to hear her lovely voice and enjoy a dazzling performance that eventually carried them through some 78 books. When in 1958 Mr. and Mrs. Kidd found a winter home in North Carolina her readings in Rochester were widely spaced and the ladies who had enjoyed them for years determined to revive the original Tuesday Reading Club and resume its program of shared readings. Aided by Mrs. Kidd's occasional visits it carried on into the 1970s.

The onset of the depression in the mid-nineties may have focused the attention of many Rochesterians on more practical concerns, but the opening of the Reynolds Library on Spring Street in 1895 provided new access to books and new facilities for literary clubs. Its report for the next year records a registration of 30 clubs, 16 of which scheduled meetings in its rooms. Among those meeting at the library were an English Poetry Class numbering 12 members, a Thackery Club of 25 members, a Tennyson Club, a Round Robin Reading Club of 22 members, Miss Hale's Shakespeare Class, St. Joseph's Literary Club, a Teachers' Reading Circle, and the Roundabout Club which had several shelves of books on reserve in an alcove adjoining the room where the clubs met. The Library reports over the next decade show fluctuations in the number and character of the clubs registered and of those using its meeting room, which, after 1900, included several Chautauqua Reading Circles. While some of the groups apparently succumbed after a few years (as in Birmingham but probably for a different reason) Rochester's active interest in books at the turn of the century could not be questioned.

Indeed, three new clubs formed in 1897 proved enduring. The College Women's Club, organized that spring, was not strictly a literary club and was open to all college women. Their number in Rochester at the time was, however, not large, and one of the club's major activities was a study group which concentrated in its first year on Russian literature and in its second year on the history of The Netherlands. Its members chose aspects of these and later topics for papers which formed the basis of their group discussions, generally held in the Reynolds Library until 1917 when the club was absorbed into the A.A.U.W.

Another still more enduring women's literary club was the Reading Club founded in November 1897 and renamed a few years later The

Hakkoreoth—the Hebrew word for The Readers. Its members, who generally numbered in the twenties, took turns as hosts and readers, presenting a brief review and extended readings from the designated book. Club members, over the years, tended to select biographies, books of letters or of family life. An occasional report by a member on her foreign journey, or a reading of an original poem by Mrs. Elaine Clark or Miss Florence McCurdy added spice to some meetings, but the variety and quality of the books covered proved sufficient to hold the interest of “a group of gracious women who take time out of busy lives to think about books, delight in their varieties of expression, and who reach out to share their enjoyment with others,” as Mrs. Wilbour Saunders put it in a paper delivered on its 75th anniversary in 1972. The Hakkoreoth is still actively meeting.

Meanwhile, the persistence and prestige of the Pundit and the Fortnightly Clubs, each of which had enrolled a few prominent business leaders eager to participate in their programs, and the scant prospect of an election to their restricted memberships prompted the organization of a third gentleman’s club on that pattern in 1897. Charles Mulford Robinson, the city’s leading landscape architect, took the initiative in the formation of the Humdrum Club that November. The original group of eight young professional and business men soon enrolled a dozen more, including Claude Bragdon, Louis Antisdale and Harper Sibley, assuring a lively and pragmatic consideration of contemporary problems. Robinson, as secretary for the first twelve years, seized the opportunity, as Morgan had in the Pundits, to develop some of his theories about the “City Beautiful” in successive papers that would ultimately find expression in his books on the subject. Despite a rule that all attendants appear in black tie at its dinner meetings, the sprightly humor and breadth of coverage of its succession of papers has welded its diversified membership into an enduring fraternity.

## 20th Century Clubs

Rochester experienced a political, social and industrial rebirth in the early 1900s. The excitement afforded by the Good Government Clubs organized in each ward, by the newly forming social welfare agencies and the Morons Club organized by their directors, by the weekly forums of the men's and women's City Clubs separately launched in 1911, and by the emergence of several new technological industries whose research executives formed a local branch of the National Association of Torch Clubs absorbed the energies of many activist citizens. The city's population had increased four-fold during the Pundit's first half-century; it had trebled during the Fortnightly's first fifty years, and the membership of both clubs reflected its more industrial character. Indeed, members writing papers in most of the twelve existing book and literary clubs were turning from philosophical and literary topics to more mundane community and national problems. Their periodic recruitment of new members to replace those dropping out eased the pressure for the formation of new literary clubs.

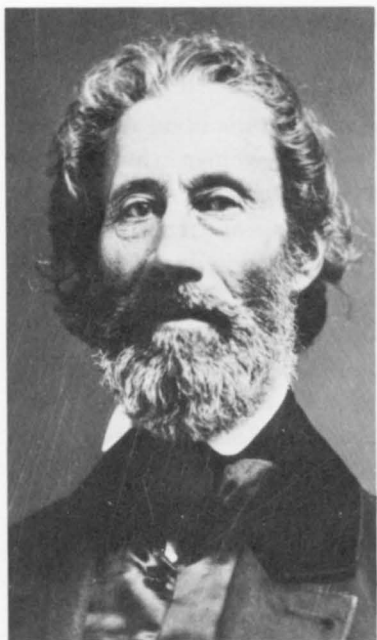
Yet the city's interest in books was by no means declining. The facilities of the Reynolds Library were constantly under pressure, and mounting demands for the creation of a public library were finally answered by the establishment of a system of branch libraries in 1911 and the opening of its headquarters offices in the old State Industrial School building. George Humphrey's old-book store on Spring Street was becoming a favorite haunt for book collectors, young Elmer Adler, George Skivington, Edward G. Miner and Robinson among them, and three of the city's six newspapers were featuring book reviews in their pages at least once a week.

The university was likewise entering a new era, assuming the responsibilities of its title by expanding its offerings, engaging new and younger faculty members, and preparing in the 1920s to move to its new River Campus. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the younger faculty members should band together in a new literary club, named the Blind Alley Club, in 1927. Most of its 18 members were professional men, chiefly from the university, and while they were able to attract a few leading businessmen, Marion Folsom from Kodak and Raymond Ball the banker, for example, the most active readers were Professors Willson Coates, Neil C. Arvin and Alfred Jones, who sometimes filled in gaps in the program when their busy colleagues had to beg off and, incidentally, supplied most of the literary and philosophical papers—"the Uses of Reason" by Jones, "The French Novel Between the Wars" by Arvin, a review of Spengler's *The Decline of the West* by

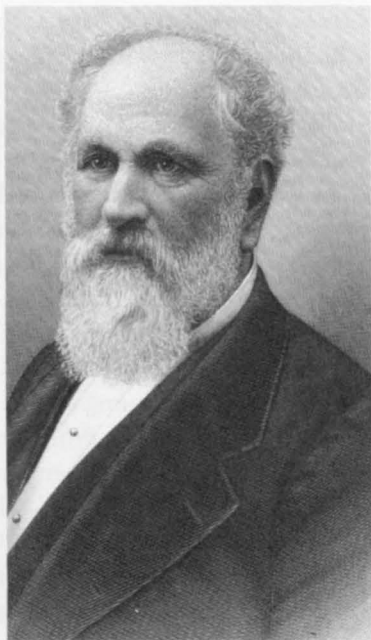
Coates. Most of the 129 papers recorded by Coates as its secretary dealt with the issues currently troubling the world throughout the club's two decades.

Shortly after the new professors launched the Blind Alley Club, several of their wives joined with other young women in founding the Book Club, which made a more deliberate approach to contemporary literature. Its members pledged to read, exchange and report on selected books, and although as their membership increased to 25 they occasionally compromised on a picnic, their focus was on current books. In the thirties, as reported by Mrs. Eleanor G. Gilbert at their 40th anniversary, they read and discussed *Gone With the Wind*, *Inside Europe*, *Preface to Morals* among others; and in the forties *The Wave of the Future*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *Cry of the Beloved Country*, *How Green was My Valley*, to mention only a few.

While the ladies of the Book Club were content with a modest title, the founders of The Philosophers Club in 1937 boldly laid claim to loftier standards. Jack Gitelman, attorney, and Jonas Knopf, clothing merchant, took the lead in organizing the club by inviting a half-dozen of their business associates to hear Dr. Jones of the university discuss "Philosophy and the Philosophers" at the organizational meeting. Apparently he gave the term a sufficiently broad interpretation to justify the new club's decision to proceed without further counsel from academics, for a full decade elapsed before Arthur J. May, the first professor to gain admittance, was elected, more perhaps for his articulate wit than for his academic distinction. Distinction, in fact, was not a major qualification, as the men who were elected and participated during succeeding years (45 in the first 45 years) were more generally noted for their awareness of contemporary problems, the objectivity and innovativeness of their quest for solutions, and the wit with which they could engage in contentious discussions. Indeed, one of the prize features of the Philosophers, as judged by Harold Hacker in his historical paper covering the club's first 45 years, was the table talk engaged in freely by members with widely different points of view—doctors vs. lawyers, the political decision-making process, the future of downtown. Another feature of the club was the practice of reading the minutes of the previous meeting at each session, recalling details of the discussion as well as of the paper, and revealing the talents and alertness of the secretary, a practice in which Thomas M. Hampson the current secretary has set a new standard of wit and coverage during the last decade. As Harold Hacker summed up his first attempt in 1975 to review the achievements of the Philosophers, "While I am sure that we all appreciate the hard work that goes into the preparation of the monthly



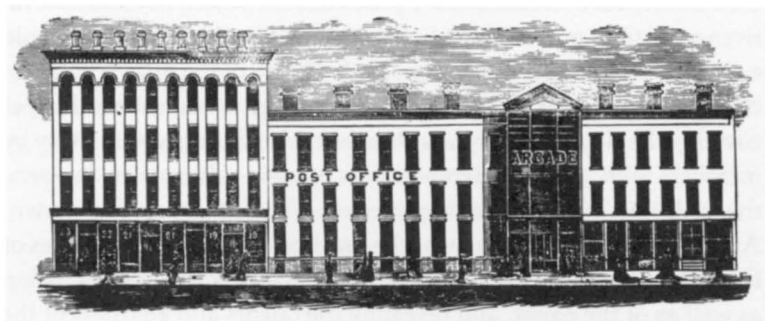
*Abelard Reynolds*



*Mortimer Reynolds*

*After the death of his brother, William in 1872, Mortimer Reynolds and a friend bought the Athenaeum Library holdings for \$3,350; and when his father, Abelard died in 1878, he established the Reynolds Library as a family memorial. It was housed on the third floor of the Reynolds Arcade shown below. (Rochester Public Library.)*

**REYNOLDS' ARCADE---EXCHANGE PLACE.**



*The old Reynolds Arcade which housed the Reynolds Library from 1886 to 1895. The Rochester Athenaeum Library earlier was housed in the Arcade Building and from 1849 to 1871, the library was housed in the Corinthian Hall behind the Arcade. (Rochester Public Library.)*

papers, I suspect that the real drawing card of The Philosophers is our continuing friendship and camaraderie."

Few references to books appear in the records of the Philosophers, or in the recent minutes and schedules of the Fortnightly, Humdrum and Pundit clubs. Most of the women's clubs have maintained a more active interest in the printed word, although there, too, it was the substance of their content rather than the quality of their expression that generally commanded attention. But if the loosely defined literary clubs of Rochester have in a sense moved beyond books, books have not been forgotten or overlooked in the city. Literary classes and book-review clubs continue to appear in varied churches and societies, such as the A.A.U.W. and the Century club, and as adjuncts of branch and town libraries.

Of course Rochester's most successful book-review program was and is the "Books Sandwiched In" of the Friends of the Rochester Public Library, inaugurated in October 1956. Interested audiences that frequently packed and sometimes overflowed the third floor auditorium of the Rundel Memorial Building have gathered on successive Tuesday noons in spring and fall series for three full decades. The high merits of most of the books selected for review and the skill displayed by the successive reviewers, most of them specialists on related subjects, have combined to provide a continuing literary feast unrivalled in Rochester if in any other city. The Public Library's earlier sponsorship of several Great Books reading classes, that commenced in the late forties and continued for several years was a worthy if less original contribution to local book lovers. Its annual salute to local authors, commenced in 1956 has seen the lineup of authors increase from a squad of ten to a regiment of more than 30 in 1986.



*An aerial view of the Rundel Memorial Building shows the beauty of the city under the building and across the Broad Street Bridge in the center. The two bridges is the old Kimball Tobacco Company that became a bridge in 1936. The buildings on the Main Street Bridge are visible in the background.*





...ful design of the building and its terrace. The Erie Canal passed  
...nter of the photograph. Directly across the river between the  
... City Hall Annex and housed the Public Library from 1926 to  
...e top of this photograph. (Rochester Public Library.)

## Book Collectors Clubs

There is another category of book clubs—associations of collectors who are interested in books as artifacts of the publishing industry, valued because of their artistry, the peculiarities of their edition, or the rarity of their specialties. The model in this field is the Grolier Club in New York City dating from 1884. Organized by a few collectors of rare books eager to exhibit and compare their treasures, it stimulated the activity of book collectors elsewhere, including Elmer Adler of Rochester who played a leading role in promoting the Rochester Historical Society in 1912 to accumulate a local historical collection. While Adler soon left Rochester to launch his career as one of America's most distinguished publishers of finely printed books and magazines, other local collectors of rare books pursued their hobby at the Humphrey store and elsewhere.

Apparently the first effort to bring book collectors in Rochester together was made by Robert Metzdorf, head of the Rare Book Division in the Rush Rhees Library, who gathered a number of like-minded men together to form a Book Collector's Club in the late 1940s. Stephen Thomas, director of the Museum of Arts and Sciences, John Adams Lowe, director of the Public Library, and Horace Hart, son of a local publisher, were active participants in its occasional meetings which continued until Metzdorf left the city a decade later. Thomas took part in the formation and activity of two other book collectors clubs, one in the fifties composed chiefly of staff members of the Public Library and the Museum, and a more recent one called The Now Nameless Bibliophiles, which enrolled members from the library and institutional staffs and from a few local book stores that deal in rare second-hand books. The range of its bibliographic taste is wide, as Thomas reports, and "covers authors, subjects, binding, printing, paper, presses, publishers, stores and auction houses," but its meetings have become infrequent as some of its active members have retired or moved away.

Attendance at the Bibliophile Society of Rochester and the attendance at its inaugural meeting on April 17, 1986 was encouraging. A round-robin response by some thirty of those in attendance displayed a healthy diversity of collection specialties. Interest in book collections and the sharing of printed information will continue to grow in Rochester through book clubs and the Rochester Public Library.



*It was a tremendous feat to build such a large building during the Great Depression. Hundreds of local men were put to work. (City photo lab.)*



*Only the extensions over the subway bed and the steps in the front appear to remain incomplete. The art work and carved words were inspirational to Rochesterians during the Depression. The demand for use of the public library increased dramatically during this period. (City photo lab.)*

## **The Role of the Library—Public Service**

*by Ruth Rosenberg-Naparstek*

On October 5, 1936, at the dedication of the Rundel Memorial Building George H. Locke, librarian of the Toronto Public Library said, "Depressions...are inside as well as outside and books have a therapeutic value in enabling men to gain the courage and knowledge to fight their way through. I hope your library will keep a wide range of books for students and a lot of fiction with happy endings. That's what we are all seeking."

About 10,000 people attended the dedication of the Rundel Memorial Building. To many of the people most involved in the growth and development of the Rochester Public Library system it was truly an accomplishment not only to open a central library at last but to open it during the deepest economic depression in our country's history. The focus of Locke's dedication remarks on this depression and the library's duty to struggling students and the unemployed further emphasize the magnitude of this accomplishment.

The Rochester Public Library wasn't formed until 1911 under Mayor Hiram Edgerton. Ten thousand dollars was budgeted for books and the first branch opened October 9, 1912. This Edgerton Branch Library (later called Exposition Park) was sometimes called the Central Library and librarians found this disturbing because it weakened their argument that there should be a central library constructed.

The Rochester Public Library system was begun as a branch system because the money budgeted was inadequate for a building constructed specifically for a library. The branch system allowed a library system to begin immediately and to put what money was available into books; the emphasis being on getting books into the homes of patrons. Branch libraries opened at a rate of nearly one a year before the depression hit. To open a new library, not remodeled, but constructed to meet the needs of library patrons was an accomplishment even greater because it was built in 1934 during the depression at a time when the library system was suffering great financial hardship.

Two years earlier, in 1932, for the first time in its history, the Rochester Public Library closed its doors on Sundays and holidays in an attempt to reduce the \$10,000 deficit in the library budget. The budget had been cut by 27% over the previous year's budget. By the end of 1932 there were rumors that city council would close the city libraries the following year. The board of trustees of the Rochester Public Library issued a resolution for the first time in its history urging city council to permit the library to remain open. The resolution stated in part, "inasmuch as the Public Library has so adjusted its expenditures to its decreased appropriations that it can carry its work to the end of the year without adding to the city's deficit, the council be strongly urged, should certain rumors in regard to temporary closing have foundation, to permit it to continue without curtailment.

"Now, in the present crisis, they are providing almost the only available means of wholesome recreation to unemployed thousands, they are making, thereby, an enormous contribution to law and order, they are stabilizing the very sanity of the unemployed and they have entered into their true character as educational institutions through the demands for opportunity for serious study these same unemployed are making upon them.

"Never in its history has the library been used as it is being used at the present time. There has been a steady increase in use since the period of unemployment began."

The library had already cut its expenses to stay within the '32 budget by letting go some full and part-time staff members. Even with the cut



*Workmen worked sometimes on elevated platforms under which subway trains roared by as they worked. The supports under the building were staggered because of the subway tracks. (City Photo Lab.)*

in library funds, there was an increase in the circulation of the books. The increase in circulation in 1931 over 1930 was 157,758 volumes. By 1932 the increase over 1931 in the first corresponding seven months was 162,390 volumes.

The library proposed closing the Genesee, Brighton, Park Avenue and Charlotte branches, but the city refused. To keep the library system open the same number of hours, budget cuts were made in personnel.

But in 1933, the four branches were closed to meet the budget deficit and staff was asked to make a "voluntary contribution of their salary" to the city and part-time staff were to be offered reduced salaries. The Board of Trustees pointed out that the staff was never well paid and now they are asked to work harder because of the increased circulation while being paid less money.

On the first day of 1933, the Central Library loaned 1697 books. It was the second largest number in the library's history and a record in six hours. In a 12-hour day at the end of 1931, the library circulated 1836 books. The library was open for limited hours on weekdays while eight branches were open only two days a week. The four previously mentioned were closed. A study of Sunday and holiday closings revealed that the patrons that used the library on weekends and holidays were the same ones who used it on weekdays, so apparently the weekend and holiday closings did not exclude a group of patrons as had been feared.

## **A Monument to Knowledge**

The granite Rochester Public Library building faced with variegated Indiana limestone faces South Avenue and sets up eight steps from a brick and stone terrace. It stands three stories above a basement and sub-basement.

Two pylons carved with figures support a colonnade at the front of the building. Ulysses Ricci of New York City sculpted the modern figures on the front of the building. The man and woman touching the head of the child between them symbolizes the continuity of life. The man holds a scroll and book symbolizing philosophy and biography. The woman carries a sword and two tablets of law symbolizing history and religion. The rays of sun and laurel festoons represent light and glory. These figures stand on the Court Street side pylon. A colonnade stretches across the doorway to another pylon above which three other similar figures stand. One of these adults carries a statue, a palet, and a pair of scales which represent art and social science and literature. The child carries the lamp of knowledge as he walks into the light and away from the darkness that is symbolized by an arc of stars. These figures represent the inscriptions cut into the sides of the building near which they appear.

Inscribed into the front of the building is a dedication to Morton Rundel. **ERECTED ANNO DOMINI MCMXXXIV FOR THE USE AND ENJOYMENT OF ALL THE PEOPLE. MORTON W. RUNDEL SO CHERISHED THE FINE THINGS OF LIFE THAT HE WAS INSPIRED TO SHARE THEM BY HIS GRACIOUS BEQUEST TO THE CITY OF ROCHESTER WHERE HE LONG MADE HIS HOME. KNOWLEDGE AND BEAUTY ILLUMINE THE WORLD**

Below this dedication over the main entrance another inscription reads:

**BOOKS  
MINISTER TO MAN  
IN HIS SEARCH FOR  
THE ENLIGHTENMENT THAT  
REVEALS THE MEANING OF LIFE**

Over each side of the front another inscription is carved. On the south end the inscription reads

**EDUCATION IS MORE THAN  
PREPARATION FOR LIFE  
IT IS LIFE ITSELF**

On the north end the inscription reads:

**THE SHADOWS WILL BE  
BEHIND YOU IF YOU  
WALK INTO THE LIGHT**

Above the main entrance there are three bronze discs with figures that represent Industry, Art, and Science. Rochester's official flower at the time of the building's construction, the aster, appears on the bronze disc with the city's crest.

Inscriptions are carved into the North and South walls of the building also. History, Religion, Biography, and Philosophy appear on the South Wall while Science, Literature and Art and the Social Sciences are carved into the north wall.

On the south wall the inscriptions read

#### **HISTORY**

**THE STORY OF THE HUMAN RACE  
IN CONFLICT WITH NATURE  
AND WITH ITS OWN ELEMENTAL  
PASSIONS BUT EVER ASPIRING**

#### **RELIGION**

**WHAT DOTTH THE LORD REQUIRE OF  
THEE BUT TO DO JUSTLY AND TO  
LOVE MERCY AND TO WALK HUMBLY  
WITH THY GOD**

#### **BIOGRAPHY**

**THE STORIES OF LIVES THAT COUNTED  
IN THEIR TIMES FOR LOVE OR HATE FOR  
MERCY AND WOE OR WELL-BEING AND JOY**

#### **PHILOSOPHY**

**THE THOUGHTS OF MEN ABOUT HUMAN  
THINKING REASONING AND IMAGINING  
AND THE REAL VALUES IN HUMAN  
EXISTENCE**



Carved into the north wall the inscriptions read

### SCIENCE

THE MASTER OF LIGHT AND ENERGY  
OF TIME SPACE AND SOUND  
FOE OF THE FORCES THAT ASSAIL LIFE

### LITERATURE

THE STOREHOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE  
THE RECORD OF CIVILIZATION  
THE FULCRUM FOR THE LEVER OF PROGRESS

### ART

INTERPRETER OF NATURE  
SOURCE OF EXULTATION  
INEXHAUSTIBLE SPRING  
FROM WHICH IMAGINATION  
DRAWS ITS LIFE

### SOCIAL SCIENCES

TOOLS FORGED IN ALTRUISM  
TO ACHIEVE HUMAN  
BETTERMENT EMBODIMENT OF  
MAN'S VISION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

From the back of the building water spills from the arches built under the building to allow the race to pass under the building and to empty into the river. A balcony is centered under the first floor window and the letters inscribed in the top of the building remind passersby that the beautiful arches are under the Rundel Memorial Building, the Rochester Public Library.

## The History of the Site of the Library

The rich historical past of the site on which the library sets is unusual and required some construction alterations. The Johnson and Seymour Race was cut along the Genesee River in 1817 by Elisha Johnson and Orson Seymour to operate mills on the site of the library. At this early period in Rochester's development there were about 1049 residents in the village of Rochesterville. In 1818 it was not yet incorporated as a city. Ten years later more than 70 mills operated along the river on both sides.

In 1825 the Erie Canal cut its way along the bank and turned a few

feet south of what is today the Broad Street Bridge to cross the river by the aqueduct. In 1842 a second aqueduct was constructed. It carried the canal across the river on the only aqueduct on the Erie Canal that also had a towpath. Over the century the use of the canal declined and the expense of maintaining the leaking canal was becoming too high. In 1919 the last canal boat wound its way along the east bank of the Genesee before crossing the river over the aqueduct. The city bought the canal bed and laid subway tracks in its bed. The upper level of the aqueduct was paved and cars and trucks began to cross where only a few years before canal boats were slowly pulled. Many city residents witnessed and casually accepted this seemingly dramatic change in our country's transportation history as they traveled the same transportation routes as their predecessors ninety years before.

As workmen began the construction of the Rundel Memorial Building in 1934, subway cars roared by the very ground on which they were to build the city's central library. The old Johnson and Seymour Race still moved along the bank. This created some design engineering problems. The supports under the building could not be made to underlie the supporting columns of the three-story building. Instead the supporting columns were required to straddle the four-track subway. Like the canal, the subway made a sharp turn to cross the river forcing the supports under the building to stagger in placement. The steel supports were driven into the bedrock underneath the building and into flume walls and encased in cement. Heavy steel girders carry the weight of the upper level building columns to the supporting columns underneath the building.

The exposed subway between the building and Court and Broad Streets was covered and paved with stones. For another two decades the subway rumbled underneath the building as patrons read and researched in the library. Even after the subway closed in 1956 the foundation of the building was left exposed to the elements. Insulation was added to exposed pipes but the construction of the foundation was forever altered by a transportation system that no longer existed. It does offer the building expansion space that would not have been built into it had the subway and raceway not been there. The capacity of the building when built was 830,000 books. The paved terraces on the north and south ends of the building were designed to allow a one-story expansion to be built to house an additional 80,000 books. Now that the subway is gone there is room to expand directly underneath the building that the designers did not foresee. There have been suggestions (and a design model) that a shopping mall be built on the old subway bed underneath the Broad Street Bridge. The library could allow

a lower level access to the mall.

It is ironic that the construction of the library became more possible as a result of the poor economy. Money for public works projects, made available through the federally funded Works Progress Administration (WPA), became available for the Rundel Memorial Building. A grant of \$314,000 was awarded by the WPA.

Arthur S. Tuttle, state director of WPA, said at the dedication ceremonies, "In the case of Rochester, WPA has not only put labor to work, it has put funds to work. Through the generosity of Morton Rundel, a fund was left to build the library. However, the sum was not sufficient for a suitable building and the money lay idle, until a WPA outright federal grant of a third of a million dollars was allotted, putting not only unemployed men but unemployed money, to work."

For years the Rundel funds were unused while the city and the Rundel heirs battled over them. The heirs claimed the city had not used the money within a reasonable amount of time. The will was probated November 29, 1911. By November of 1919 the original estate had doubled as a result of careful investments and a large amount of money recovered from Rundel's nurse, who had inherited stocks. In 1926 the Rundel heirs brought suit against the city charging that the city had failed to build the library as requested by Rundel and the money should be forfeited. Supreme Court Justice Adolph J. Rodenbeck dismissed the suit ruling that the city was not required to act within a specified period. That same year Harriet Rundel, Morton's sister, died, and her share of the inheritance was given to the city as required by Rundel's will. The Rundel fund, available for the first time in whole, now totaled \$850,000. In 1932 Judge John Knight of the Western New York District Court, ruled against the heirs saying that the money was an outright gift to the city, not a trust. The decision was appealed but the argument was not filed within the allowed 90 days and the lengthy litigation ended. By April 29, 1933, the city's Rundel Memorial Fund had grown to \$995,996.

Though the depression slowed construction across the country, it spurred the city council to choose a site for the Rundel Memorial Building. Councilman Joseph L. Guzzetta proposed the construction as a "means of stimulating employment in the building trades."

There were sites proposed on Broad Street, South Fitzhugh Street, Spring Street, Irving Place, and Chestnut Street. Guzzetta believed if the council chose from among the city properties it would end the clamoring to sell property to the city.

Guzzetta opposed using Rundel funds to buy a site and requested that the City Manager Theodore Briggs offer a list of city-owned sites

for council consideration. Guzzetta remarked, "I feel that a million dollars is enough money with which to finance the Rundel Memorial Library and Fine Arts Building provided it is spent in building and not on sites." He feared that spending money on a site would require a bond issue during a period of economic depression. For this reason, he opposed Councilman Chester A. Peake's selection of a site at Washington, Broad, and Spring Streets. The Rundel money could be used to provide work for men in construction.

Finally in July the Rundel Memorial Building committee narrowed the sites to two: the site of the city hall annex on the west side of the river or the site between Broad and Court Streets on the east side of the river. The Broad and Court Street site was selected and City Manager Briggs engaged an architect immediately after the selection in order to take advantage of federal public works funds.

It was difficult to get the owners of the Johnson and Seymour Race to sell to the city so the city could place supporting pillars in the bedrock there. City Council rejected the owners' offers to sell where the city wanted the right-of-way because the asking price was too high. Condemnation orders were issued on the property and the final price was set by a condemnation commission.

Architects Edwin Gordon and William Kaelber were chosen and Hunkin-Conkey Construction Co. of Cleveland was hired to erect the building. The company brought only foremen and heads from Cleveland, the nearly 300 laborers hired were local residents. Even subcontractors used local labor whenever possible.

The Johnson and Seymour Race was shut off for 60 days after September 18, 1934 to give workers time to drive in pillars to support the library. A framework was constructed to protect the workmen from wires running the subway. The race was widened and the city assumed the responsibility for the walls under the building in return for easement on the race for those owning water rights. RG&E owned 18 of the 19 first water rights. Others, mostly second to fourth right owners asked for sums of money up to \$700. The city refused and moved under an order of immediate possession and the prices were set by a condemnation Commission. In compliance with the race agreement, a 50-foot screen was stretched across the south end of the race to catch debris before it could enter under the building.

A year and a half after construction began, the three-story steel framework constructed by WPA and Rundel gift funds, rose over the old Erie Canal bed without further interrupting the subway or the flow of the race beneath it.



*Morton Rundel in a lighter mood. This photograph was taken for a post card at the Board Walk in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1909. He sat before two mirrors that reflected these four images of himself. (Rochester Public Library.)*

### **Morton Rundel (1838–1911)**

"Little was in the newspapers about Mr. Rundel when he died. His death received scarcely a headline until it was found that he had bequeathed to the city a sum for an art gallery or library."

Morton W. Rundel, whose bequest financed most of the Rundel Memorial Building was a quiet man who did not have many close friends. He grew up in Alexander, New York, eight miles south of Batavia and there he attended school. He moved to Rochester to attend business school and here lived with George Eastman's family. George Eastman's mother was the sister of Morton Rundel's mother and people recall that their resemblance was striking. Eastman and Rundel were close friends and they often fished together.

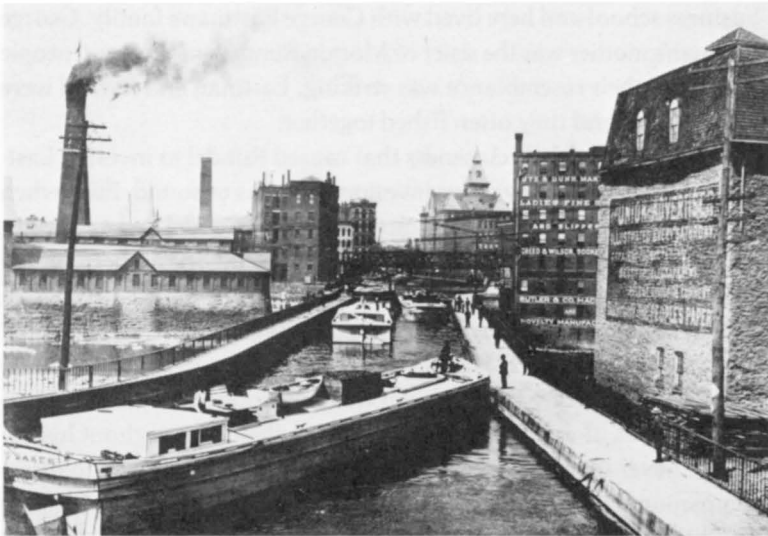
Perhaps it was their closeness that caused Rundel to invest in Eastman's Kodak Company when investors saw it as unsound. Even when his money was tight, Rundel clung to his stocks. Rundel had a curiosity about life after death that drew him to a medium. She advised him to keep his stock when he did consider selling it and he was always indebted to her when his investment began to soar.

Rundel collected art. He had a sound business in Smith's Arcade where he sold picture frames, but it was Kodak stock that allowed him to buy works of art. Rundel remained a bachelor throughout his life and he never owned a home until poor health required him to hire a companion. He bought a house on East Main Street, but continued to visit his boyhood home in Alexander until his poor health prevented him from traveling.

*Copy edited by Hans Munsch*



*Looking west across the canal (now Broad Street Bridge) the old Kimball Tobacco Company can be seen. It served as the City Hall Annex and from 1926 to 1936 it housed the Rochester Public Library. (Rochester Public Library.)*



*This canal boat has just passed over what is today the terrace of the Rochester Public Library.*



*During WW I Rochester's public library served its soldiers abroad. Above, citizens collect books at the Genesee Branch Library. Below, men gather books to send to the soldiers. (Rochester Public Library.)*



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