

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## And This Was Rochester!

Excerpts From the Old Citizen Letters  
of Edwin Scrantom

Edited by HARRIETT JULIA NAYLOR

### Editor's Introduction

On June 16, 1862, there appeared in the *Rochester Democrat and American* a letter describing pioneer conditions on the site of Rochester. Although the communication was signed simply "An Old Citizen," there was no attempt to hide the identity of the author whom everyone recognized as Edwin Scrantom, a prominent member of one of Rochester's "First Families." He continued to publish his reminiscences first in the columns of the *Democrat and American* and then in those of its successor, the *Democrat and Chronicle* for a period of seventeen years. The last one appeared on May 1, 1879, just sixty-seven years from the day that his family arrived by ox-cart at the falls of the Genesee. There were altogether one hundred and seventy-two of the numbered articles headed "Notes and Incidents of Rochester in the Old Time and the New," as well as others signed "An Old Citizen" but not part of the series, all of them averaging from one to three columns in length. In these letters the writer indulged in rambling recollections of the past of Rochester and its environs, leaping backward and forward in time as his fancy dictated and stopping every now and then to indulge in a bit of moralizing or in a saccharine eulogy of some old friend. During the long series of articles he repeated himself many times, going back, especially, again and again, to recall his mem-

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ories of the first few years of the city's history. Despite the repetitions, however, and the interminable lists of names familiar to Scrantom's original readers but now for the most part forgotten, and despite the dullness of many of the passages, there runs throughout a golden thread of valuable and rather exciting reminiscence.

An attempt has been made to choose for reproduction parts of the letters which it is hoped will provide interesting reading and produce a picture of the development of Rochester from the tiny frontier settlement to which Scrantom had been brought as a child to the bustling mill town in which he spent his manhood. It is obvious that extensive and, in some cases, ruthless cutting had to be done. The material for the most part has been arranged in a roughly chronological order. To do this, parts of different letters have been combined and the original order of the articles, which was entirely unschematic, has been abandoned. On page 24 is a list of the letters from which these excerpts have been taken, with an indication of the contents of each. An effort has been made to include sections long enough to give something of the flavor of Scrantom's own style. Spelling and grammar have been corrected only where the mistakes were obviously typographical or where the change was necessary to clarity. A few explanatory notes have been inserted to help the reader locate places or identify people and sub-titles have been added.

The "Old Citizen" was one of the eight children of Hamlet Scrantom, a pioneer settler and the first householder on the west bank of the river. In later life Edwin Scrantom was a printer, the publisher of a literary paper, *The Rochester Gem*, a merchant and an auctioneer. He was a member of the "first band" described in his letters, a communicant of old St. Luke's Church, and an active participant in the life of the community. The youthfulness of America is brought home to us anew with the realization that Scrantom, who died in 1880 at the age of seventy-seven, had in his lifetime witnessed the development of Rochester from a forest clearing to a thriving city. No wonder he paused so often in his reminiscences to compare the present with the past and to ejaculate, "and this was Rochester fifty [or fifty-seven, or sixty-three] years ago!" Now for the story in the "Old Citizen's" own words:

## The Settlement at the Genesee Falls, 1812-1817

It was a wild and desert place. It was more. Not merely was it a wilderness, and like all places in a state of nature cheerless in the day time, and doubly dark and dreary in the night; but clustering on either shore of the River, and running back from it a goodly distance was a thick jungle of all kinds of the dogwood, the alder, the birch and choke-cherry, the bramble and the blue-beach, into whose tops were matted ivy and the wild grape, and these formed a tangled canopy under which the wild beasts crouched and serpents innumerable crawled! This was *Rochester fifty years ago*. But it may be well to go back of this our advent into the Genesee country a few weeks, and commence the journey hither. . . .

About the twentieth of April, 1812, early in the morning, at the village now called Constableville, on the Black River, in the town of Turin, Lewis County, N. Y., a man embarked his family on board a strong wagon provided with bent poles and covered with linen cloth. The wagon was long-reached, and in it many household articles were packed away, especially beds and bed clothes, and the family clothing—and roomy chests and trunks well packed were there, and one was filled with *luncheon*. The family consisted of the father and mother, and six children, four boys and two girls. Attached to this wagon was a strong yoke of oxen, and in front of them one horse, to serve the double purpose of helping along the load, and carrying on his back one or two boys, except when going up hills. . . . All things being ready, '*whoa haw*' was said to the team, and away they went. . . .

The ninth day, at night, we rested at "Major Stone's Tavern" about 4 miles east of the Genesee River, and the same house, though somewhat remodeled, stands there still! [The Orringh Stone house is still standing on East Avenue opposite Council Rock.] Major Stone told us that the road to the Falls had not yet been cut out west of Oliver Culver's Tavern—that the bridge was not yet built across the Genesee River, and that we must go south, [by] taking the first left-hand road, and strike the river above the rapids, where we could get across in a ferry boat. Near the close of the tenth day, and apparently the most laborious of all the journey, we found our-

selves and effects on the east bank of the Genesee River above the Rapids [near the present River Campus]. After a little delay we found . . . Gid. Allen, the owner of the scow boat used for crossing the ferry. It took some little time to get our team and wagon into the boat, to chain up the cattle and block the wagon wheels and make all ready before launching away upon the swelling waters which at that time were rolling muddy and majestic. All things being ready, Allen and a young man armed with "setting-poles," pushed out into the stream, so that while crossing the current should not carry us down below the landing place on the opposite side.—All things were propitious, and in a short time we were across in safety, and found a place to compose ourselves, in a rude, isolated, half-log and half-plank building, in front of which, swung in a frame, on the top of a post, a sign, a little longer than it was wide, and written upon it "Castle's Tavern." This was 2½ miles from the Genesee Falls. . . .

The next morning, May 1st, 1812, my father and three of the boys, the youngest of which was the writer, came down with the yoke of cattle, to see our new home which had been agreed to be in readiness for us. — We found on the lot now occupied by the Eagle Hotel and Powers' Banking House [the present Powers' Building at the Four Corners], the logs rolled up for the body of the house, with an opening left for a door, and another for a window, but without roof or fire-place or floor. A few hands were engaged building a bridge, where Buffalo and Main street bridge now is [Main Street west of the bridge was called Buffalo Street until 1871], informed us that two of the men employed to build our house having been taken with "fever and ague," the others had become alarmed, and all had gone back to Big-tree [Genesee]. Going up a long ladder at the west end of the bridge we crossed on the string pieces of the two piers of the new bridge, to the east side of the river, and found the tavern of Isaac W. Stone — a small wooden building, then standing on South St. Paul street near Main, the most commodious and roomy part of which was the "Bar-Room." A little farther south, and near where the east end of the Erie Canal Aqueduct now reaches the shore of the river [Broad Street and South Avenue], we found Enos Stone's house and family. He was at work at, and was just finishing his saw-mill on the bank of the river

below. . . . Conversing with him, my father got permission to occupy for his family a shanty he had lately moved out of, and near his own, and also engaged to take charge of and run his saw-mill. . . . Leaving the other members of both families to their own operations, the writer first saw Clarissa Stone in front of her father's house, and something like the following conversation was had.

"Have your people come here to live?" said the girl.

"Yes," I said, "we've just got here and are at the rapids above."

"How many children are there?"

"I have two sisters and three brothers, all but one older than I am," I said.

"Well, we shall be glad of that; for we want some children to play with, and there are not so many as there is in your family here now," replied the delighted Clarissa.

By this time one or two of the Stone children had joined us, and it was remarkable how quick and easy we became acquainted, a circumstance I always remembered.

The first thing I was shown was a spring board across a log, which was called in the language of that day a "teeter." Next I was told that there were plenty of black walnuts that had floated down the river in the floods and were scattered along the shore among the driftwood. With my new companion I was soon searching on the shore for these nuts, and they were abundant and very good for that kind of nut. I was assured also that there were plenty of butternuts and hickory nuts here, and grapes along the bank, and game in the woods and fish in the river, and I thought the prospect fine and should have pronounced the place beautiful, but that all day long there was a storm of snow that came in gusts, with large flakes that melted the moment they touched the earth. And this storm became very heavy upon us as the day waned and we were wet to the skin. I remember we boys had a strong desire to see the high falls, but could not, and the desire increased as we heard the heavy roar of the waters and saw the spray occasionally high above them. Night advancing, we left the steers in the log enclosure, chained to the side of it, and after feeding them with the fodder we had brought found our way back to the rapids on foot, where the plainest kind of a lunch was devoured with the keenest relish for

there is no relish like hunger after exhausting fatigue. And then the description we gave mother and sisters! I do not remember that there was any distrust expressed in word or looks, but there was scarce any reply and no enthusiasm except on the black walnuts we distributed, which were cracked and eaten by all. . . .

Next morning the snow was apparently a foot deep, as we wound our solitary way to our new home on the Genesee. A short description of the house will not be out of place. The frame was four posts set in the earth, with joists between them horizontally at top and bottom, and upon these were pinned inch-and-a-half plank. These plank run up so as to form a peak or gable ends, across which was a ridge-pole supporting a roof built of slabs. There were two openings—one for the door, the other, near it, for a window. Inside, cross-pieces were pinned in just at the lower part or eaves of the roof, and on these were laid part of the way across, boards, which served for a chamber floor, and a ceiling for the room below. A quantity of stones, for a fire place were piled up in one end of this room, which was about 14 by 20, and rough boards for a floor were laid upon the ground, which came as near the fire as prudence allowed. — The hearth, which was one of nature's make, was a broad one and the smoke, when the wind of the open door did not send it rollicking through the room and into our eyes and noses, was let out at the top through an open place in the roof. We had neither cellar nor chamber. Into this place we disposed ourselves, and in it composed ourselves for over sixty days of the longest days and the dreariest nights that ever wanderers saw in this world—and on the shortest allowance, not seeing an ounce of butter or tea, coffee, or sugar during nearly the whole time. — *This was Rochester fifty years ago!* not a family on the west side of the river, and only three on the east side. Preparations were made to roof our log hut on the Eagle Hotel lot; the new saw-mill furnished the slabs and other timber for the roof, and the river, then very high, falling, materials were brought over the fording place, which was just below where our Jail now stands [near present Court Street Bridge], and parts of days, and some times a whole day, father and sons were at work finishing the shanty. One sunny day, about the 15th of May, 1812, while working on the roof, my eldest brother discovered wild bees in the top of a large black oak tree. . . . and forthwith my father

marked the initials of his name upon it, to claim it and cut it down in the fall, when the bees should have had the season to store it for us with honey. The month of May proved to be a very mild and beautiful month, and wore away at length . . . till blooming June, with her soft step, ushered in the summer to bless man and clothe all nature with beauty. . . . Just here the cloud, which had threatened the nation's peace, burst; war was declared with Great Britain, and darkness settled upon all our hopes and prospects for a time.

On the 4th of July, 1812, we left our plank shanty on the east side, and removed to our log one on the Eagle Hotel [Powers] lot. Here we were a little more comfortable, having chamber room under the roof, into which we ascended by a moveable ladder. Musquitoes, the original inhabitants of all new countries, annoyed us much, and nightly we were obliged to kindle smouldering fires on the outside to prevent their eating us up alive! In the day time we could hear and see in the neighboring swamp the wild deer as they went to the "Deer Lick," now near the corner of Buffalo and Sophia streets [Main and Plymouth], and at night, in our beds, we could hear the mournful owl hoot, (for it was day-time to him,) the sharp barking of the fox, and occasionally the howl of the wolf! This was *Rochester fifty years ago*, with *one family* on the west side of the river! . . .

We draw to a close the first year of the war, and of 1812, remarking that there had been little or no improvement about the Genesee Falls, and that the closing of the year was a gloomy one. Isaac W. Stone had finished his tavern; the proprietors of Allen's Mill lot had surveyed it into village lots; a postoffice had been established, the first quarterly income of which was \$3.42 — A. Reynold, Postmaster . . . and Ira West opened his first store. Two log houses and a saw and grist mill were put up in Frankfort, in the north part of the village, and the Browns had purchased the most of Frankfort and laid it out into village lots. There were many projects and much prophesying, but all waited on the war and its results, — and the battle here was between hope and fear, too equally poised to warrant a calculation on human destiny! . . .

The year of 1813 came in laden with tales of war and bloodshed, and gradually the subject of war became the all-absorbing one, and the question in Western New York was not how shall improvements be promoted, how shall we enlarge and execute our plans, but how

shall we keep the little beginnings from destruction, and our families together during the war. . . .

On the 14th of May [1814] the British fleet, with five large and eight smaller vessels of war, appeared off the mouth of the Genesee river. The alarm being given, all the male inhabitants of the village capable of bearing arms, amounting to thirty-three, turned out with the militia of the towns around us, to prevent Sir James Yeo from landing, leaving only two men here to guard the women and children, and in case of his landing . . . these men were to send the families to the woods for safety, on the east side of the river. This menace was the most serious of the perplexing "scares" that agitated the village, and lasted several days. . . . Before the little band of men left the village for Charlotte they threw up a breastwork at Deep Hollow [Lake Avenue between Glenwood and Lexington Avenues] . . . which was then what its name indicates, and the design of this breastwork was to shield the men from the fire of the advancing enemy, while they poured in upon them, should they attempt to cross the bridge. . . . But the breastwork never had a sortie to give it a history, or a baptism of blood. Years afterwards we boys went in it and over it, and gathered hazel nuts from the bushes that grew there thickly, and rehearsed its history and the excited haste in which it was thrown up; and years further on the Commissioners of Schools placed the school house there, and obliterated the first and only fort that was ever erected for the defense of this city. After a parley with our men at Charlotte the fleet left, and not many days after the army of American stragglers followed suit. . . .

This attempt to capture and burn Charlotte and Rochester . . . depressed all hearts here, and the principal topic was about removal. My father . . . purchased the "King Farm" [near Mt. Hope Cemetery] for \$5 an acre and arranged to remove there. . . . Let me add that our stay on the King farm was short. The treaty of peace between England and America was concluded in December, 1814, and in the April of 1815 we moved back and took our places again in Rochester, and the few citizens here were that very day celebrating the news of peace, and were firing a brass six-pounder from the top of the Brighton hill [Main Street hill] that they were using balls at every discharge, and were pouring them into the woods that



covered the elevated lands that now lie along on the west side of Livingston Park! Rochester never saw a more glorious day. She sprung to her feet like a chained giant released; commenced her glorious career, and has never halted in her march. . . .

The first Fourth of July celebrated in Rochester was in 1815, I think. We all congregated at A. Reynolds' Tavern, where the post-office was kept, and arranged the order of exercises, which were to end by the boys having a "sham fight." I remember that on that occasion several men spoke from the stoop which was in front of the post office. . . . There was not men enough to get up a celebration at that time in the village, and few came in from the country, and the boys had it all their own way. They marched across the bridge and to the top of the hill on the East side—the hill then being very much higher than now—where they were reinforced by the East Side boys, then marched down with the drum and fife to the four corners, where a soldier by the name of Wallace, a Scotchman . . . volunteered to drill us. . . . This Wallace had been a soldier in the American army, and was at the battle of Lundy's Lane, and had a rifle taken from a fallen British soldier in that battle. . . .

### Life in a Frontier Village

The years 1815-16-17 were, in the history of Rochester, years of fast building, and shanty building of course. The saw-mills ran constantly, getting out stuff, and every night, I remember, just about midnight, I could hear Ezra Mason, who ran Brown's saw-mill, filing his saw, after which he would sleep two hours, leaving the mill in the care of a young man whose name was Bill Bloomer, after which he would resume his labors. As building pushed forward, master builders came in . . . who, though they often worked night and day, could not keep the demand for dwellings, and frequently families would bivouac one, two, or three weeks in their covered wagons before they could find a place to dispose of themselves—and it was said of one family that they bought a lot on Buffalo street . . . cleared away the bush, drove into the clearing, and commenced building around their covered wagon! By day the edifice came up as by magic, and by night, by the light of burning pitch-pine knots, they

continued it, when at the end of one week the roof and 3 sides of the house and the floor were completed, when the household traps were disposed to the places chosen for them, and the men manned the wagon and run it out into the woods; and the seventh day finished the front and last part, with its two square, paneless windows and its batten door, and then and there the family became citizens of Rochester! . . .

As building progressed, population increased, and in 1817 an act of incorporation altered the name of Rochester to that of Rochester-ville [the "ville" was dropped again in 1822], and in May of that year the first village election for five trustees was held. . . .

This year of 1817 Elisha Johnson purchased of Enos Stone, from the west side of his farm, 80 acres adjoining the river and running back beyond Chestnut Street. This plat he laid out into village lots. He also constructed a dam across the Genesee at or near the old fording place, and commenced excavating a large mill canal thence to the bridge, 60 or 70 rods in length, about 60 feet high and 4 feet deep. He thus, at an expense of \$12,000 opened extensive water privileges, and was joined in this great enterprise by Orson Seymour and others of Canandaigua. At this time the greater part of the purchase I have spoken of was the original forest, into which as yet not an axe had been struck. . . . This race or mill canal was built as far down as Wm. Atkinson's mill. . . . The first water that was used was let into his flume and upon his wheels—an event that was celebrated by Messrs. Johnson & Atkinson, and many others with them, as one of great importance to the village and surrounding country. In building this race there was much powder used, as great quantities of stone had to be lifted out to make that water course. The stone thus quarried being of no use but a burthen, it was dumped off into the river—and this was the first, as I have always believed, of the encroachments upon the river from the east side, which have been continued, to the great detriment of the whole city.

Having given an account of the first celebration of our National Independence by the boys in Rochester, I will now give my recollections of the celebration of July 4th, 1817. This was joined in by the people on both sides of the river, and was a spirited affair; and many people from neighboring towns came in to swell

the numbers and heighten the conviviality. A long Bough-House was put upon the brow of the hill on the east bank of the river. . . . Green posts from the forest, with a crotch at the top, were fastened in the ground, upon which were laid poles, and smaller poles were laid across these, upon which green boughs of all sorts of wildwood were strewed profusely, hanging over the sides, which formed a good and pleasant canopy to repose under from the sun's scorching rays. Under this, and running the entire length, were erected tables of rough boards, where the dinner of the occasion was to be served, and where it was afterwards eaten with great relish and satisfaction. . . .

We come now to the company all seated at that long, well-filled table, under the bough-house. Elisha Johnson was at one end, while Enos Stone was at the other, to do the honors of the table. Rev. Comfort Williams [Rochester's first resident minister] . . . said grace at the table, and then amid jokes and merriment the good cheer was partaken of until all were satisfied. Then came the toasts, which were honored by the firing of ordnances as they were drank. This ordnance was none other than twenty blasts, which had been put down in the race by direction of Mr. Johnson the day before, and which were all ready to go off. The first toast was, "Our country,—prosperity attend her." Then two of the blasts were touched off, making the wood resound, added to which the hurra! three times over. Then followed other toasts, the blasts doing honor to them until all were ended. The people were wild with joy, and every man shook hands with his fellow pioneer and wished him God-speed; women and children, without ceremony and in perfect freedom mingled together on that occasion with one heart and mind—and Johnson was complimented for his tact in furnishing the race-way artillery, which, while it spoke loud, and rent the forest with its long echoes, lifted the solid rock in the water-way he was building, doing good service.

As there was then no bells to ring, one blast deeper in the rock than the rest, was reserved for the gun at sun-down—and when this was fired, and as its great boom died away in the forests that surrounded the village, the people quietly retired to their places of abode to talk over the pleasant incidents of the day, and to bless their stars that the lines had fallen to them in pleasant places, and they

had so good a heritage! The night that followed that fourth day of July, was more than usually still. The barking of the fox, the howling of the wolf, and the owl's sad hoot—the usual accompaniments of the night—were not heard—the great guns of the raceway had awed them all into silence!

I must be pardoned if I bring back the dead and the strayed [of the first Rochester band] and parade them once more through these streets, where erst they performed under the eye and patronage of the founder of the village, Col. Nathaniel Rochester. We called ourselves a *full band*, and as to the question of fullness, I think I may say as a whole, that they possessed it largely in their music . . . but they had it also in all the relations of life as good men and citizens. They were like the first fire organizations, embracing the leading men, yet a little more in the hearts of all were they, because as musicians they were pleasing to the ladies and children—and on public occasions they were honored with especial prominence, as on parade-days they were at the head of the column and saluted the staff of officers. They were very acceptable too in all the families where they went by invitation, or whom by partiality and special favor they serenaded at night. And as the common bugle was then more potent than Gambatti's masterly played trombone, or Levy's inimitably touched cornet, they could call the whole populace together with a few blasts of it, and hold them to their last strain. . . .

The thing was suggested by a small circumstance. In the fall of 1816 a mountebank strayed out into the West, and coming here, desired to give an entertainment of jugglery, tricks and sleight-of-hand performances; and, for some cause, could not get into either tavern on either side of the river to display his wonderful magic powers and Enos Stone let him use his kitchen, in his house on South St. Paul Street, where he "astonished the natives" literally, by his tricks. For want of a newspaper to advertise in, he called his audiences together by blowing a bugle, which he handled very well, always standing at the top of the hill, as we called it then, at the corners of Main and St. Paul streets. . . . The magician so charmed the people with his horn performances, that one young man was found to emulate him, and Horace I. Sill procured a bugle, and learned to play it very well. But he did not want to play it alone, and finding Preston Smith, who had belonged to a band in

Boston, and played the clarionet, they and a few others began to talk of forming a band. A meeting was finally held in the dining room of Abelard Reynolds' tavern, and it was determined to form a band as soon as instruments could be obtained from Utica. This was accomplished in the winter of 1816-17, and the band was formed the following spring. . . .

We had . . . a good player by the name of Thompson, a shoemaker on the east side of the river. He was inclined to be fast, was of a genial make and cracked a good many jokes. He was a great favorite, and in the absence of the leader, was sometimes chosen leader for the evening. It was in a day all will remember, when to drink wines and liquors was the common practice. . . . At a rehearsal over the saloon, kept by Mr. Bond, in Exchange street, when Thompson was made temporary leader, he ordered in the course of the evening, wines and liquors, which were brought in. At the close of the rehearsal, Mr. Strong [Myron, brother of Alvah Strong] brought up the subject of drinking, gave his opinions and objections, and [moved] that no more should be introduced under any circumstances. It was carried affirmatively, though I am bound to say by a small majority, and placed Thompson in an uneasy position for as chairman he had to put the question that had arisen from his own practices, and to hear it decided against him. This move created a little dissatisfaction—the only root of bitterness that I ever recollect that disturbed the harmony of the old band. . . . The practice was never repeated, I think, while the old organization lasted. . . .

## Police! Murder!

The citizens of the quiet and orderly village of Rochester, in early days, somewhere from 1820 to 1827, were much disturbed by the increase of vice and crime. Burglars had found their way here, and some startling scenes had taken place, and some mysterious fires had been set. Horse thieves appeared also in the county, and the region of Sandy Creek, north of the Ridge Road, was said to be their hiding place. The country people organized Horse Thief societies, who found a good deal of business on hand—and the villagers in quiet Rochester consulted together to devise measures

for their common protection. At length they formed a Citizen's Night Patrol, who voluntarily watched at night. It commenced with six, and when there was a moon was reduced to four each night. The patrol was provided each with a pistol and knife, and was not to have on so good a dress as to appear to be the best citizens, which they were. . . . [Many] prominent citizens belonged to this protective band, and were many times on duty to guard the interests of their families and of the citizens generally. Some little flurries occurred that made food for gossip and wonderment. As, for instance, one night a suspicious looking loafer was scared up in "Bugle alley", now Exchange Place, back of the Arcade. He was disguised and had a visor on when found skulking. He took to his heels, with Ben. Brown and Jno. Packard after him. They followed him, rather tremblingly, across the river and down the Andrews Street hill till they lost him in the woods on the Falls field, not daring to go further in so dark a wood and suspicious a locality! The story of their adventures made a great deal of talk next day, but it was strongly suspected that a certain wag had ventured on the enactment of this scene to try the mettle of the new watch, and that it was a sell! . . .

In the fall of 1837, among other agents and helpers at the City Mills was one William Lyman, who was employed in many ways, and especially bought wheat and other grains for the Mills, and was entrusted at times with large sums of money. He was one of the most faithful and conscientious men that could be found. . . . This man . . . one Monday night in October, 1837—not very late in the evening—having closed his business for the day, at the City Mills, started to go to his home, on North Clinton street, near the corner of what is now Clinton Place. At that time the west side of Clinton street, and nearly through to St. Paul, was an open green, and when Lyman was on that green, and not far from his house, a murderer stealthily crept along behind and near him, and shot him through the back of his head, killing him outright! This was the first murder committed in our corporation—the beginning of a long and bloody record. . . . As may be imagined, when the knowledge of this murder was known, there was an excitement among the citizens that was awful. At first the people seemed struck dumb, and when, afterwards, they got their breath, there

came indignation and wrath; and men struck their clenched fists together and grated their teeth in rage, and many seemed fairly beside themselves. "*The murderer must be found*," all men shouted, and every one was an officer. . . .

When Lyman was found, his clothes were torn open . . . his pockets turned inside out, and what they had contained had been taken. His body, stiff and cold, lay with the face down. He had fallen headlong when the fatal bullet was lodged in his brain; and, in so being prostrated, his hat had fallen off and rolled away some distance from where he fell and lay on the ground. . . .

Judge Humphrey . . . found the body of Lyman on the fatal green where he fell, with others who met there at the time. . . . Our city was then a little over three years old [Rochester had been incorporated as a city in 1834] and the police were immediately detailed to search out the murderers of Lyman. The perpetrators proved to be three young men, viz.: Octavius Barron, about 19 years of age, a Canadian Frenchman; and two other young fellows, named Bennett and Fluett, *alias* Philwell. They were arrested the day after the murder attempting to leave the city by the cars going west, and were found waiting and lurking among stacks of lumber piled in a yard near the upper depot. . . . They had hid the wallet taken from Lyman—which contained only a small amount—in a pile of lumber after the arrest. But they failed to get a large sum of money from Lyman, which was in his hat, that bounded off on the green when he fell. This hat, with its valuable contents was found soon after the discovery of the murder, and the money was secured to the owners of the City Mills. Barron, Bennett and Fluett were secured in Monroe County Jail on the Island, and the rush of people was great to see the three youthful men, who, to secure a little money, had taken the life of a good citizen. . . . It afterwards was proved beyond a peradventure that Barron, young as he was, planned the murder, led Bennett and Fluett in with him while he shot the victim. . . .

Barron's trial was commenced the 28th day of May 1838, and the rush was so great to get into the Court House, that much delay occurred in consequence, and not one half of those who crowded there could get in. Ten days were consumed in the trial, the people in and around the Court House by hundreds crowding and jostling

one another, vainly attempting to hear and see the proceedings; and on the 7th of June the jury found Octavius Barron guilty of murder in the first degree, and he was sentenced to be hung the 25th of July following. . . .

The trial of Barron furnished an instance where the curiosity of woman furnished justice with a strong rope to bind the guilty, and it was in this wise. After the murderers of Lyman had obtained his wallet, they came hastily across the river to a saloon kept on the east side of State street. . . . This saloon took in, on the rear part of it, a room back of the store adjoining it on the south. This store was occupied by some lady milliners and dress makers, who at the time—late in the evening—were closed up, and just ready themselves to depart, when the murderers of Lyman came in behind their store, surrounded a table and begun conversation in loud whispers, which attracted their attention. Looking through a crack in the partition these women saw their movements, observed their excited actions, and finally saw Barron draw out the wallet, open it and divide the money! Afterwards they heard his swagger, heard them call for brandy, saw them drink it, and then button up strongly and go away bravely, as if they had done some deed to be proud of! In this episode these curious women got the countenances of the murderers, and were able to bring a testimony against them that could not be overthrown.

[The execution of Barron] took place the 25th of July, 1838, and was conducted by Darius Perrin, who was then Sheriff of the County of Monroe. . . . For several days previous to the execution there were various floating stories about it; men saying that it was never to take place; that he was to be pardoned at the last moment; that a band of men disguised and armed were to rescue him; that the jail and court house and all about them were to be burned; that an awful horror hung over this city; and every other terrible thing, the marvel of which was how and by whom they were got up, and why they found anybody to believe them. Now while the majority gave these stories no credence it was apparent that they had a bad effect and cast a deep gloom on the dark, dreadful day of the execution.

But the day came, the military were out and passed through the streets all lined with nervous, staring people, the execution took place



and the body of Barron was delivered under a military escort to his father and family. . . . After all was completed the heavy cloud that hung upon the city slowly lifted, the light came in and men came back to their reason. Talk about sensation and a nine days wonder!

## Scenes Along Old Exchange Street

There is no street in Rochester that has such a wonderful history as Exchange street. When originally laid out it extended from Buffalo street corners to the "Bulk Head," as it was called, a frame barricade built with upper and lower gates as a guard to the mouth of the mill race, where the water came into it from Johnson's Dam, in the Genesee river. . . . A more unpromising street from the beginning has not been opened, and though it had a day of prosperity for years after the opening of the Erie canal, it has its long night of desolation, when desertion, ruin and decay seemed a power that well nigh destroyed it. Built up with good edifices at great cost, at one time, the depreciation afterwards was fearful, and carried with it a wholesale ruin to many individuals and companies whose earthly fortunes were pitched into it. . . . This pall lay upon the former glory of Exchange street until the Genesee Valley Railroad opened since which time a reviving influence has begun to be felt along the desolate places of this ancient and early active thoroughfare. . . .

And first, I remark that, to use a Hibernian figure, when the street was first opened, it wasn't opened at all, for there was a ledge of perpendicular rocks six to ten feet high, on it about midway from Buffalo street to the canal—the same ledge commencing at Sophia street—now Plymouth Avenue, and running to the river. . . . On top of this ledge was the old "Indian Path," and when it came to the point of rocks, there were irregular stairs and offsets, winding down, said to have been the work of the aborigines. . . . This abrupt rock in Exchange street had to be dug off and blasted away, which was done from time to time, until it was sufficiently reduced to be used as a street; the exact year it was done is not in my memory, though I think the street was not much used and did not attract notice until the fall of 1819, when the State engineers made a survey of the route of the Erie Canal, through the village. . . .

Perhaps I remember Exchange street more vividly than other parts of the city, from the fact that there, in 1816, I commenced learning the art of all arts, my apprenticeship in printing, with A. G. Dauby, who printed the first paper here, *The Rochester Gazette*. There were few papers taken in Rochester at that time. Only two weekly papers came here, one from Albany and one from New York.

People had time to work but none to read, and of the books in possession of the villagers there were not enough of them all to make a common library fit to fill one bookcase. But everybody agreed to take the village newspaper, and the business men to advertise, and large stories were told of what the future would do, and of the prospective value of lots, and of the water power, of the farming interests around us, and the valley of the Genesee was to become famous as that of the Nile, and nature's great highway to the west, the Ridge road, was not left out. After much deliberation Mr. D. concluded to open his printing office, and in searching for a room he finally hit upon a building where now is the office of the Democrat & Chronicle, the entrance to the second story of which was by a gallery from the bridge, included by a fence on each side. The room was large, but entirely unfinished, not even lathed, and the floors were laid down loose, and had between the boards gaping cracks and in this room was printed in the spring of 1816 the *Rochester Gazette*.

In the fall of this same year the office was removed to the west side of Exchange street, a little north of the Clinton hotel. The building was a small, story-and-a-half structure, and had been erected for a store. It had been vacated, but the shelving and counters were in it. A partition was put up to inclose about one-third of the rear part of the store, and in this back room was arranged the stands with the type cases and the venerable Ramage press was set up, so as to afford room to go around it. It was here, in the month of October, I think, that the writer commenced to learn the "art, trade and mystery of printing," as an apprentice to A. G. Dauby. The front room was used for storing paper, and for the miscellaneous refuse that accumulated in the office. Afterwards, the shelves contained blank deeds, bonds and mortgages and other blanks, which finally accumulated to a stock in trade, and the printer contemplated ordering some school and juvenile books as soon as the population would war-

rant the venture. But one thing that this room contained I remember distinctly, and that was a rough box, or "bunk," that was rigged up on the floor under one of the counters, for the apprentices—two of us—and coming to this scanty provision, as I did, from a bed that my good mother had always provided, and in her love provided well . . . the contrast was so great . . . that it brought homesickness, and sighing, and sometimes tears. . . . I was of a tender age, only just passed 14, when I left the best of homes and mothers, to go among strangers. . . . I got seasoned to my new role of apprenticeship, which grew pleasanter as time wore on, until the smiling approval of my masters rounded my life into a series of work and service that was very pleasant, and even desirable, and now lingers on my memory as one of the brightest periods of my life.

The building that was now our printing office stood upon a ledge of rock, and was approached by some stone steps leading up to it, or by the road, which was a steep acclivity and hard to ascend by us, and especially by teams heavily loaded. This was before Exchange street was graded down, and when that grading did take place years after it left our office very uncomfortably perched upon the street, and so undesirable for a place of business. I remember some three years after—during which time our printing office had been removed from it—that I went to school in the same building one fall and winter, the school being kept by Filen & Fairchild as a "classical select school." . . .

[The Rochester House] was erected by Palmer Cleveland about the year 1827 for a Hotel. It was built originally of stone, and well finished. Commencing with a wing on Spring street, it extended around on Exchange street, about an equal distance, which was the hotel as first opened. Subsequently brick buildings were erected for dwellings on the street adjoining the hotel, and running to the building on which the cupalo [sic] stands, which was erected by Cleveland in 1934, about which time a row of balconies were erected on the front of the store part of the hotel on Exchange street, which in after years becoming unsafe was ordered down. About this time [1834] these brick erections became a part of the hotel, and when opened in their entirety, were, in fact, splendid and spacious.

It may be remarked here, that of all the landlords who longer or shorter flourished in the Rochester House, not one is believed ever

to have made it profitable, while it is known that many were out of pocket in their enterprise.

[On the 29th of April, 1853] the building took fire in the south end on the corner of Exchange and Spring streets, which destroyed about one-half of the building, and involved in its ruins four of the domestics employed in it. I well recollect the excitement at the conflagration and when it was announced at the fire that human beings were perishing in the building, a wild excitement ran through the crowd of people assembled, and was talked of, till instead of four who really perished, the number was worked up to a score, and embraced wives, husbands, and children. . . .

From the balcony of the Rochester House many political speeches have been made, Fourth of July orations delivered, and greetings at military displays. It was from this balcony that Martin Van Buren spoke to a solid mass of people below, when on his tour through the country while he was President of the United States. . . . And in later days the Reverend clergy alternately occupied the balconies for a pulpit, where Sunday afternoons were spent preaching to the canal men and others, and earnest appeals were made also by the late W. C. Bloss and other laymen.

Last, not least, that noble institution, the Industrial School of Rochester, was commenced in this building, and was allowed by John M. French to continue there about two years; he receiving such rent as their appeals to the public enabled them to pay. Soon after that last good object bid good-bye to this once glorious public palace . . . the martins and swallows took up their summer abode in the cornices of the portico outside, and inside it was given up not only to the owls and bats, but to humans more wakeful and wicked, and its richly furnished drawing rooms and chambers, from the bridal chamber to the inviting family rooms, were changed to the bare floors and squalid condition of the shiftless and abandoned, till they descended to "holes," where the occupants stayed, but with the loss of all comforts ending with pig-pens and dog-pens . . . a perfect realization of degradation and poverty, that had its representatives from almost all grades of human society who had found their way through all the phases of indulgence and excess. . . .

When the Rochester House was in its glory Exchange street was *the street* of Rochester. [Scrantom then enumerates the street's

leading merchants in clothes, drygoods, shoes, stoves and tinware, crockery and glass, drugs and books, saddles and lottery tickets.] There may be mentioned here Moses Chapin, who was acting First Judge of the County and Justice as well. His office was up the Museum stairs in the room so many years of late occupied by Eben Ely. It was in this office that the first anti-Masonic committee was formed after the disappearance of William Morgan, and the first set of explorers appointed to go out to the swamps near the Ridge Road, west of Hanford's Landing, to search for the body of that kidnapped Masonic martyr. Mumford & Whittlesey's law office was opposite to Judge Chapin. Whittlesey was one of the Morgan committee, and was Vice Chancellor of the 8th district, and so continued until the office was abolished by the new Constitution. Back of Judge Chapin's rooms was Marcus Morse's book bindery, and overhead was the pioneer engraver, Martin Cable, who made so many illustrations for Giddings' Anti-masonic Almanac and for the pamphlets issued by the Morgan Committee—illustrations that showed that he drew largely on his imagination for the incidents, and some of which were much too overdrawn even for a comic almanac. . . . This ancient engraver was a persistent Sabbath breaker, and when called to account for it, said to his friend that one reason for his Sabbath work was, that many of his engravings must be executed with great privacy; and the other was that his creditors could not dun him on that day! The exit of this man and his family from the village was sudden and not very creditable. To them it was a necessity, and to their neighbors a rejoicing. . . .

Above these offices in the third story was the museum, kept by Mr. Stowell, who had been a travelling exhibitor of wax figures for many years—and it was called "Old Stowell's museum." Added to the animal, bird and beast tribes, the monsters of ocean and the congregation of wax figure celebrities, were side performance rooms, and quaint enough they seem in these days of modern shows—where Winchell unfolded his olio of oddities, and where crowds, such as Corinthian hall cannot boast of, yearly went to get, what the world has been after in vain, their fill of entertainment and amusement. This was a great place for the boys, and I may add the girls too, and Henry L. Smith speaks for more than a score, when he says that on one 4th of July he went there and remained through five separate

and distinct performances, paying for each as they followed in succession. . . . Another young man says there were temperance plays often, and bands of Indians doing the war-dance. The Kentucky giant was there, and then the wonderful wax figures, who can forget them! William Wallace, the Albino Girl, the Rochester Beauty! Gen. Jackson, Blue Beard, Johnson killing Tecumseh, the Siamese Twins, Col. Monroe shooting an Indian who was scalping a boy—recollect those tears in the boy's eyes!—and that marvel of mechanical skill, the witch of Endor raising the ghost of Samuel before Saul! And then there were quadrupeds from largest to smallest, and the bird and bug and spider and fly tribe were represented in glass enclosures—and there was a temple of industry, where turning a wheel turned out all sorts of miniature men and women, bobbing about full of business and bluster, with an automatic band wiggling and jerking and pounding as if making music for the represented workers in this temple of industry. And then, who that ever heard it, cannot recall the jirking asthmatic wheezing of that wonderful board organ, set in the window, that constantly with its siren tones, lured the rustic into the mysteries and wonders of the museum. As year after year the old organ was diligently "ground," it became more melancholy, one note after another dropping out, until the familiar strains of "Blue Eyed Mary," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "Bonaparte Crossing the Rhine," "Nancy Dawson" and other airs were sadly marred. . . .

Then there was another appendage to the old museum, which was a red-headed, white-bodied rabid, large-sized bird in a cage, hung out in pleasant weather on the outside, whose ever-lasting squall, screech, whistle, and yell was "enough to craze a nation," as old granny Gavitt said when trying amid its squalling, to make a complaint before Justice Wheeler to have it removed. This noisy thing was called a South American cockatoo, and with the organ, was for a long time a terrible annoyance. . . . Finally, I remember, these things lost their objectional features, and business proceeded, and took them in as part of its everlasting din. . . .

I think after a few years J. R. Bishop, a gentleman from New Haven, Conn., bought an interest in the museum, and it was conducted by Stowell & Bishop. Very superior wax figures purchased in Philadelphia were added, and the museum was valuable, and its

equipment in the best days of it involved a large outlay of money. . . . After the death of Stowell the old museum passed into the hands of Mr. Bishop entirely, who ran it many years. Mr. Bishop was . . . a good naturalist, and he paid good prices for all specimens of birds, as well as other curiosities, and year after year the museum filled up, until it was judged to be one of the best in the country. But the public lost interest in it, and the population demanded some side shows and theatrical entertainments, which the proprietor did not venture upon from conscientious motives, and the establishment run down and got behind. At length he hit upon a new enterprise. . . . He made an arrangement with Tom Mercer, a successful daguerrotypist in the Arcade, to come and take stock in the museum, open a room there, and by a small advance on the admission fee, give the benefit of the museum and a copy of the patron's face. This new arrangement worked well for a time and might have continued but for the bad personal habits of Mercer. . . . The result was that Mr. Bishop sold his whole interest to Mercer not many months after . . . and left for Cincinnati. . . .

After many fruitless efforts to keep up the old museum, it was abandoned, and a few years after, most of its contents were sold to the trustees of the Genesee college at Lima, where it was removed to be distributed in such a way as to be a benefit to the students that chose that college for an education. . . .

An interesting chapter might be written, right here, about Smith's Arcade and Irving Hall. In the days when that rival of Reynolds' Arcade was in its glory, it was a place of no inconsiderable consequence. It will be remembered when Smith's arcade was in the form of an L., the large entrance went in and out of Buffalo street, and there was an opening alongside the old Rochester Bank, through to Exchange street, and these halls were much frequented, and were a great convenience and a great thoroughfare. When the Irving House was kept on Buffalo street, up stairs, by a decidedly popular landlord, this arcade and hotel were places of resort and business for the best business men of the country. Irving hall too has seen many historic demonstrations; been the place of many lectures, concerts, political and religious assemblages, and as its name infers was a place of learning and letters. . . .

We now find ourselves standing on [the famous "Loafer Bridge"]; not a man or woman, swain or maiden, school boy or girl in by-gone days, in all the city and region round but "knew it like a book," and went out of their way to come to it, in their peregrinations about the city. It was named by Jim Hamilton, the fisherman, otherwise "Loafer Jim," who not only gave this bridge its cognomen, but who added to the thousand words of the slang dictionary that significant word "loafer" . . . . \*

Indeed, we imagine we can almost see again the long, slim, pointed boat, with its glass sides flashing in the sun, as it rounded to, and came into the aqueduct on the east side of the river, her bow and stern displaying ribbons and streamers, as she dashed along, a thing of life, drawn by three over-driven horses, panting and snorting, and covered with a foam of sweat. — We can see, too, the lines of trunks . . . as they stood along the deck on the outsides, and in the middle, a standing congregation of gentlemen and ladies, all agog, and expectation, ready to see and be seen. We can hear too the nervous duett of two "Kent Bugles", or it may be a band of music, as it heralded the incoming packet. . . .

Sooner than we are telling the story, the Packet enters Child's Basin. Loafer Bridge is a living mass of human beings, handkerchiefs displayed and answered from the boat, three cheers go up, and the crowd, especially the boys, rush for the packet office, where cabmen and hackmen and porters and "runners" call for guests, scramble for hotels, and make "confusion worse confounded" by their bickerings and black-guardians. [The captain] has discharged his passengers, and there is quiet on Exchange street till the next arrival. It was at this point that this street was at the height of its glory. . . .

*\*Editor's Note:* According to *A Dictionary of American English* (Chicago, 1941) the word "loafer" first appeared in the slang vocabulary about 1835, its first known use being in a New York magazine in that year.

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:** These excerpts have been taken from a scrapbook of the "Old Citizen Letters" and other Scrantom articles in the possession of the Rochester Historical Society. The numbered letters used were: 1 and 122 (Arrival of the Scrantom Family); 2 and 4 (First Band); 19-22 (Exchange Street); 39 (Rochester in 1817); 40 (4th of July, 1815); 41 (4th of July, 1817); 61 and 142 (First Newspaper); 68 (Old Museum); 79 (Child's Basin); 96 (First Murder). Use was also made of the material on the War of 1812 from the articles on pages 65-67 of the scrapbook and of that on the Rochester House from the articles on pages 55-57.