

ROCHESTER HISTORY

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Water Power City Overflow or Leaves from an Historian's Notebook

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

No doubt an apology is in order for the use of such an idle topic in these trying times, yet it is scarcely necessary to justify a study of the community's traditions when so much effort is being devoted to the preservation of our way of life. We must know more about the origins and evolution of our society, as well as its present character, if we hope to see and play an intelligent part in its further development. An intensive study of the history of Rochester has been in progress for several years, and the early completion of a volume on *The Water Power City* carrying the story of Rochester down to 1854, is now in prospect.

Needless to say, many interesting facts and suggestive items have turned up which it has been impossible to work into the record. Frequently, choice illustrative material proved too abundant on one topic, and some had to be cast aside; always the need for brevity required the trimming and cutting of over-extended chapters. Long before the first draft was completed I found my scrap file almost as weighty as the magnum opus itself. Possibly I will be pardoned, therefore, for sorting out some of these items and piecing them together (as our grandmothers used to do with the trimmings and leavings from their pies) into a sort of historical tart (if I may change the figure) to help sustain those in charge of the home fires.

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Backgrounds

Of course the origins of the Water Power City should properly be traced back to the ice age, but we will begin with the rush of settlers into the Genesee Country approximately a century and a half ago. Carl Carmer may have seen the following letter in the course of his researches on *Genesee Fever*:

To the Printers of the Wilkes-barre "Gazette." Gentlemen: It is painful to reflect, that speculation has raged to such a degree of late, that honest industry and all the humble virtues that walk in her train are discouraged and rendered unfashionable.

It is to be lamented too, that dissipation is sooner introduced in new settlements than industry and economy.

I have been led to these reflections by conversing with my son, who has just returned from the Lakes or Genesee. Though he has been to neither the one nor the other;—in short, he has been to Bath, the celebrated Bath, and has returned both a speculator and a gentleman; having spent his money, swapped away my horse, caught the fever and ague, and what is infinitely worse, that horrid disorder that some call *terra phobia*.

We can hear nothing from the poor creature (now in his ravings) but of the Captain Billy [Williamson], of ranges - townships - numbers - thousands hundreds - acres. Bath - fairs - races - heats - bets - purses - Silk Stocking - fortune - fevers - agues, etc. My son has part of a township for sale and it is diverting enough to hear him narrate its pedigree, qualities and situation. In fine it lies near Bath and the Captain himself once owned, and for a long time reserved it. It cost my son but five dollars an acre, he was offered six in half a minute after the purchase, but he is positively determined to have eight, besides some precious reserves. One thing is very much in my son's favor - has six years' credit. Another thing is still more so - he is not worth a sou nor ever will be at this rate.

Previous to his excursion the lad worked well, and was contented at home on my farm, but now work is out of the question with him. There is no managing my boy at home; these golden dreams still beckon him back to Bath, where, as he says no one need neither work nor starve, where, though, a man may have the ague nine months in the year. He may console himself in spending the other three fashionably at the races.

A. Farmer

Hanover, Oct. 5th, 1796 ¹

It is interesting to note that one aspect of the Genesee Fever, "terra phobia," did not apply to the lower Genesee in the 1790's. While Bath, Canandaigua, Geneva and other settlements up the valley were rapidly developing, the number of pioneers who ventured down to the falls of the Genesee were few and far between. When Stephen Tucker of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, passed through on a hunting expedition in 1796, an attack of ague forced him to remain for several months near the fording place above the falls in a "slab house of entertainment for man and beast." Tucker saw enough of the Western wilds on that occasion, as he later recalled, to make him a contented resident of the Bay State.² Others were more venturesome, however, and those who escaped the fever and other hazards began the long and difficult task of improving the trade facilities on which the future of this area depended. The most substantial enterprise of the day was that at King's Landing on the west bank below the lower falls. Lake boats could ascend to that dock, but a road was needed to open a trade connection with the Genesee above the successive falls, and a letter from Oliver Phelps, one of the chief land promoters in the area, suggests the co-operative character of this project:

Sir: It was agreed by the proprietors of the land in the fall town, that in case Mr. King & Col Granger would make a Dugway up the Bank & make a Bridge over the Deep Hollow, and cut a good cart Road by the falls, that they should be allowed five Hundred Dols to be assessed on the proprietors—They have nearly completed this business, which will be an immense advantage to the town—you will see the assessments and if you can settle it with Col Granger it will be agreeable. I am Sir your most ob'd. & humble serv

Oliver Phelps—

Proprietors proportionable part of the expense of 500 Dols in the Fall Town of Genesee River—

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|-----|
| | O Phelps | 120 |
| | Justin Ely | 105 |
| | Hartford | 50 |
| | Stone, Hinckley & Williams | 105 |
| Justin Ely, Esq. | Col. Granger | 60 |
| Wt. Springfield | King | 60 |

500^s

Unfortunately these promising developments were soon checked. The mills erected by Ebenezer Allan at the upper falls in 1791 fell into ruin,⁴ and many of the lower Genesee pioneers withdrew. Apparently no one was on hand to explain the advantages of the area to Captain Thomas Bowels who came seeking a town site in 1799. An interesting letter, written by Charles Carroll to Colonel Rochester in 1817, when property values at the falls were mounting rapidly, is perhaps our only reminder of ill-starred Bowelsville:

Col: Troup need not have been so short with you about the sacrifice of the Rochester property, it was offered to Captⁿ. Tho: Bowels in '99 for much less money who went to view it and would not purchase, we bought it from Mr Johnston at Mr Lindslys on our way home, when Mr Williamson was in Europe & if I am not mistaken Col: Troup was then the Agent - as to the sacrifice of the other property, it was the want of money & not under Expectation we were to settle it, & Mr Williamson's letter to me clearly proves his object, & it is petulant in Col: Troup to animadvert on the subject.⁵

Though Rochester, Fitzhugh and Carroll acquired the choice 100-acre tract at \$17.50 an acre in 1803, they remained for several years in Maryland, awaiting the further advance of settlement. Scattered pioneers were arriving, clearing farms through the area, and in January, 1810, a second effort was made to develop a fall town at the King's Landing site below the lower falls. An advertisement in the *Ontario Repository*, printed in Canandaigua, describes the new venture as follows:

Frederick Hanford has opened a new store at the place known by Fall-Town, four miles from Lake Ontario and offers for sale, a general and well chosen assortment of Dry Goods, Groceries, Hardware and Crockery. Also Iron Hollow Ware and Pot Ash Kettles; Window Glass, Sole Leather, Shoes, etc. and a great variety of other articles, too numerous to mention. All of which will be sold very low for Cash or most Kinds of Produce.—He wishes to purchase Pot and Pearl Ashes, Flour, Pork, white oak Butt-Staves, and 2 or 300 gallons Whiskey.⁶

Rochesterville

Soon the well known story of the first permanent settlers at Rochesterville was being enacted by the Scrantoms and their neighbors amidst the uncertainties of a frontier war.⁷ Fortunately the several miles of forest separating the hamlet from Lake Ontario proved an effective barrier to British attack, and Hamlet Scrantom acted with others to establish the community's first district school, collecting some of the necessary funds from pioneers east of the river who later brought suit for the recovery of \$103.91.⁸ Thus, even the first settlers discovered that, despite their bridge (only the bridge at Main Street had been erected by this time),⁹ the river was to serve as a persistent dividing line. Nevertheless, the Genesee was likewise proving to be a most useful feeder as well as a power source.¹⁰

The return of peace brought renewed activity at the Genesee Falls where a half-dozen substantial promoters and many modest settlers were engaged in a boisterous "town raising." Among the other leaders were the Ely brothers and Josiah Bissell, whose capital of \$14,000 enabled them not only to build and equip a store, erect a sawmill and a grist mill, but to acquire some valuable land holdings as well.¹¹ Their advertisement of February, 1815, spoke confidently of the future:

Our New Mills near the Bridge, at Genesee Falls, are in operation for custom work, and will in a few days be ready for flouring upon an extensive scale, as we shall have four run of excellent stones, with a Screen and Smut Machine. The Bolts are of first quality. Our miller is exceeded by none in skill and experience. We will be accountable for all bags lost by our miller.

Ely & Bissell¹²

So rapidly, indeed, did business increase that Ely and Company were soon forced to advertise for additional helpers,¹³ while the Genesee Manufacturing Company, headed by Francis Brown, called on its stockholders for payments of \$15 on each share by the end of 1816 in order to speed the completion of Brown's race and thus facilitate the proper development of the "hydraulic resources" of the main falls.¹⁴

Simon Pierson, a Scottish pioneer at Le Roy, already a comfortable hamlet some distance up the valley, came down by sleigh a few winters later and put up with his wife at Dr. Ensworth's tavern at the Four Corners. There, over the mantel shelf, where all crowding around the blazing hearth could read, Pierson saw an advertisement of Jethro Wood's newly invented cast iron plow, and the next spring the new invention was put to work on his own farm.¹⁵

Evidence that the dread fever, "terra phobia," had at last reached Rochester is provided by a letter written shortly after his arrival by young William Atkinson, destined to become a leading miller and realtor in the rising village:

I was very much pleased with the singular appearance of this village rising up in the midst of a wood—and on examination it far surpasses my expectations—it is one of the safest and best situations for mills I ever saw—there are at least Eighty of them (speaking within bounds) which when improved will make it one of the first situations in the State. The country about is very fine and rapidly improving for the produce of which, this must become the place of deposit. I have been down to view the different falls and the mouth of the river, and was highly gratified. The appearance of them must be beautiful in summer. . . .

Indeed property increases so rapidly in value from the constant influx of strangers that a capital could not be better employed than in the purchase of lots and selling as they rise and purchasing again elsewhere. A man is sure to get 50 percent—if not double his capital in one year. . . . If you wish to purchase and make it a Co. concern it must be done immediately for in a few days it will rise. From the Number of improvements to be made this summer—lots will rise astonishingly by the fall of the year.¹⁶

Rochesterville, as the settlement at the falls was officially known between 1817 and 1822, had now become the most thriving New York State town west of Albany. A petition was sent to the Federal authorities for a fort at the mouth of the river as a safeguard in case of another war with England, but fortunately that structure was never built and never needed.¹⁷ Meanwhile, two local weeklies were displaying the advertisements of newly arrived merchants, one of whom found occasion to offer a one-cent reward for the return of his indented boy.¹⁸

In contrast with many neighboring communities, still dependent on barter, cash was offered at Rochester for flaxseed, wool, wheat, butter, and "pork in the hog."¹⁹ Watches were advertised for sale at the sign of the Gold Watch, but Abelard Reynolds, the postmaster, soon decided to trade his gold watch for a picket fence to be erected around his newly completed residence.²⁰

Boom Town

Of course the most important "event" in Rochester's early history was the building of the Erie Canal which crossed the Genesee just south of the Rochester bridge. Boats began running east of Rochester in 1823, two years before the canal was completed to Buffalo, and soon the construction and operation of these boats became a major local activity. A passage from Rochester to Utica cost \$3.25 in 1824, but dropped to \$2.40 the next year, and generally averaged a cent and a half per mile. Three hands would operate a boat in the early days, serving ham and eggs, bread and butter, milk or whiskey to their twenty or thirty passengers,²¹ but as the years passed newer packets provided improved accommodations. The services of a barber at 19 cents a head, a shoe shine for 3 or 6 cents, and bounteous meals served in elegantly decorated, if crowded, cabins were features of the thirties, though already the greater number and usefulness of the freight boats were crowding the packets from Clinton's Big Ditch.²²

When young Joseph Nichols visited Rochester by canal boat in 1825 he was "astonished at its growth." After looking about at the town of 5,000 residents clustered about the mills at the upper falls, he strolled down to the taverns at the lower falls where he "played a game of nine pins."²³ Such pastimes were already frowned upon by the more respectable elements in Rochester, and the editor of the *Album* could announce the next year:

Good News for the Citizens of Rochester:—

Died on the 17th inst. early in the morning Mill-street Theatre, aged near three months. The disorder was of the most distressing nature, to wit, the Trustees of Rochester.²⁴

Travelers did not always view the town with the same enthusiasm. One rambler, who arrived by canal, declared that "Rochester is the handsomest town on this line. . . . Some of the houses are tastefully decorated . . . [with] covered balconies attached [sic] to the front."²⁵ Another visitor, who came by stage from the West, received a different impression: "There is no great beauty about it, and at this [spring] time I consider it a dirty place. All of the streets are filled with mud and rubbish. Building is the order of the day, but there are few houses in the place which can be called handsome. . . . Yet when its natural advantages are considered, I know no place which can compare with it."

Cultural activities were making their appearance. A debating society, which met regularly once a week in Mr. Filer's school room, was generously applauded in the press,²⁷ but when three young agents from the "Hartford book factory" appeared with a supply of books for sale cheap, the leading editor, who had a bookstore of his own, declared that "these knaves excite contempt."²⁸ However, the arrival of a boat load of students under Professor Amos Eaton of Troy engendered keen interest in their mineralogical survey,²⁹ while the standing of local Methodists was enhanced when sixty young parsons gathered at the Methodist Chapel for their annual Genesee Conference in 1830 and voted to establish a seminary at Lima up the valley.³⁰

Educational endeavors, though not as favored as those of a strictly religious character, were increasing in number. Thus the governor found occasion to praise a Rochester experiment in his message of 1832:

I think it not improper to notice an interesting experiment now in progress in the village of Rochester, to combine mechanical labor with instruction in those sciences which appertain to a liberal education. The pupils rise at four o'clock, work three hours and study ten. I have looked over an account which has been kept with twenty students during the last quarter, and they are credited for earnings in coopering, joiner's work and printing, a sum amounting to a trifle short of all the charges against them. Mechanical alternates better with study, then agricultural labor. The institution was founded last spring; it numbers now sixty-one pupils, and bids fair to realize the expectations of its generous patrons.³¹

But the attempt that year of several young men to form a teachers' association in order to secure an advance in their meagre salaries met with little encouragement and gained no public mention until a local editor took up the cause of educational reform more than a year after the association's demise.³² In sharp contrast was the substantial support enjoyed by several of the churches. The annual reports of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, second largest in the town, revealed that the sale of pews in 1835 brought in a fund of \$5,000 from the 298 communicants, who contributed \$1,383.50 the next year for missions and other outside church work.³³

Since the character of the rapidly growing community was diverse it must be reconstructed from many sources. When Abelard Reynolds, the postmaster, served in the legislature, he received an urgent letter from one of his constituents requesting a revision of the divorce laws. The wife of his correspondent had, it appears, left in a temper five years before and had been persuaded by her parents to sue for divorce, thus condemning her unhappy husband, under existing laws, to a life of restless celibacy.³⁴ Equally suggestive of the town's character were the numerous accidents reported in the press. The occasional drownings in the river or canal and the injuries suffered when an unwary passenger riding on top of a canal boat was caught under a low bridge were not peculiar to Rochester, though their number was perhaps characteristic of the reckless life of the town. Quite unique, no doubt, was the experience of the man who fell into Brown's race while attempting to clear away an ice jam early in 1827; fortunately, although he was carried down over the spillway ninety feet into the gorge, no bones were broken.³⁵ Crime records are similarly revealing, on occasion, and the \$100 reward offered by the village trustees for detection of the persons who stole Mrs. Chapman's body from the burying ground in 1832 conjures up a vivid picture of a young medic, stealthily seeking to increase his knowledge for the benefit of his 10,000 fellow citizens, most of them horrified by the indignity involved.³⁶

Rochester was to gain wide repute in these years from a succession of colorful characters—William Morgan, Sam Patch, the Fox Sisters, to mention a few—but most of these were only by chance and very briefly associated with the town. More genuine local color was provided by Samuel Works, a tanner from Vermont, who was

remembered by Thurlow Weed as "practically a father to all new comers," especially to industrious and deserving young mechanics, who reciprocated by dubbing their rough-hewn friend "Leather-stockings," a sobriquet which stuck to the end of his life.³⁷ Another modest character was "Russell of '76," an aged veteran of the Revolution, who was appointed bell ringer in 1829 and for nearly a decade rang the court house bell regularly at daybreak and tolled solemnly after each death. Joseph Russell also served as lamplighter when the first oil lamps were installed, and he was not above expression in verse on occasion, as the following portion of his "Ode to the City Lamps" reveals:

The lamps are burning bluely bright,
Like large cigars
Smoking within the misty mouth of night
They shine like stars.³⁸

The Flour City

The thirties and forties brought new experiences as Rochester assumed its place as the leading flour milling city in America. The homes of several affluent millers rivaled those of the town's leading promoters of the previous period—at least until the depression of the late thirties brought hardship and gloom. Merchandizing likewise prospered during sunny times. Thomas Patterson could look back in after years and survey his early career as the "Young Ames" of Rochester. Shortly after his arrival at the age of fourteen in 1819, Patterson secured a job as clerk in Ely and Bissell's store, and winning the confidence of his employers was able to venture into business for himself; by 1827 he was operating a wholesale dry goods agency, making semi-annual trips by horseback up the valley, collecting orders and payments on goods brought from the East. Possibly the reverses of the depression prompted a trip to Europe for his health in 1839; at any rate he was back in five months and three years later won a Whig seat in Congress.³⁹

Many residents, however, were less fortunate, and as early as 1830, when the first local boom had come to an end, much hardship was noted by the *Rochester Morning Courier*:

Perhaps at no period of time has Rochester contained a greater number of poor people, destitute of the necessities of life, than at

present. Women and children who have never before been under the necessity, are now running from house to house to beg fuel or bread. . . . The winter has thus far been severe, more so than for several years past, and those who were unprepared, or were detained here by the closing of the canal and have been unable to find employment, are either freezing or starving or both.⁴⁰

Many, even among those who prospered for a time, eventually moved on to the West. The experience of the family of David K. Cartter was not unique. Arriving among the pioneers in 1814, Mr. Cartter had associated with others in building the Mansion House, long the favorite social center in town, and bright prospects loomed ahead until 1828 when the fever claimed his life, leaving Mrs. Cartter with a family of four growing boys. Soon all were drifting west, and 1848 found one son a lawyer in Michigan, another in the same calling in Ohio, a third farming in Wisconsin, and the youngest already restless in his clerking job in Ohio and destined to join the gold rush to California.⁴¹

An increasing number of immigrants as well as additional migrants from the East sufficed to maintain Rochester's steady growth. New traditions and new experiences were thus added to the community life, as a lengthy and informative letter by Joseph Webb to his family in England reveals:

October 26th, 1933

Dear Friends,

I'm happy to say we are all safe-landed in the land of Liberty & good living after a long, wearisome & expensive voyage, & thank God with but little sickness. . . . [We] set sail from London the 10th of May [and] had a beautiful view of the shipping down to Gravesend. . . . We had a great many passengers [on] board, 143 in the Steerage, amongst them were 68 children; 1 child died & 1 [was] born; [there were] 23 cabin passengers, 23 Sailors, Captain & 2 mates. A great part of our voyage was very rough & cold, almost a head wind half the time. I recollect the 13-14 & 15 of June was very wet and cold, colder than you often felt it at Christmas in England, the Waves flowd over the Bow spit & Bulwarks so that but a few was able to be upon deck; the women and children was obligd to lay abed almost all the time. I think there was 7 out of 10 sick these 3 days. The Sailors sayd it is always cold when crossing the Banks of Newfoundland, as we were there then. The 23 I believe was Milton

feast, a fine summer Morn, quite calm. A great many of us dined upon deck that day. . . .

[We] came in sight of a light house the last day of June at 8 at night on Jersey Island about 40 miles distance. All hearts was glad, I assure you. We landed at New York the 2 of July, a warmer day I think than I ever witnessed. Hawkins & us went to the May Pie Tavern [on] Gold Street to board. On Thursday, the 4 of July, being the day the[y] gained victory of the English [in] the last War, there was a grand review & every Tradesmen of every description was drest in rigementals bearing arms, some on horseback, some on foot, bands of musick marching with them, the streets decorated with ribbons & flags, & a most elegant display of fire works in the Evening. It was a beautiful sight. This [is] done every year in commemoration of gaining their Liberty & Freedom. We went on board a tow boat the 6 of July that was towd by a steamer up the North River to Albany, a distance of 165 miles in 26 hours for 2 [dollars?] each. We did not stay above an hour [at Albany, but] shifted our luggage on board another boat that was drawn by horses to Rochester up the Canal, a distance of 275 miles [which we covered] in 4 days & ½ traveling night and day at that low charge of a cent a mile each. Landed at Rochester the 12th of July and thankful we was to get in a house to ourselves once more. [We] stayd in Rochester about a month. There is not much baking done there, for most people bake their own. I see I could do better at Farmers Work. I went to hay-making & so did Mr. Hawkins. Had 3s a day and board. I did not stay their a fortnight. I left Rochester & went 7 miles up the country west, to harvest work. I had 5s a day and board, English money, Some hands had 8s a day to cradle wheat. . . .

Farmers are considered the best business in this part of the country. The land is very cheap. The first rate cleand land [varies] from 5 to 6 pounds per acre [and] it gets worth more every year. There is a great many people a going to Michigan this fall, a new settlement 400 miles west of us. They buy land from 2s - 6d to 10s per acre. Mechanicks get good wages; tailors, carpenters, shoemakers & blacksmiths do excellent well. There is a great many journyemen millers at Rochester from England. I saw 4 myself last week at 1 mill. They told me they received wages from 5 to 6 £ per month. The mills are very extensive. . . .

Please God I have my health. Its a excellent country for young men and women. A young man as is handy at farmers work can have 12 dollars a month, board, lodging and washing. . . . A Young woman [is able] to do house work and have from 5 to 7 dollars a month & not work half so hard as they do in England. Its only one cooking for we all eat together. But, still, I do not wish to persuade any of you to leave your own native country to come here if you had

rather spend the remainder of your life under oppression & amidst pride and ambition, than in the Land of Liberty & Freedom where there's no distinction of Persons, [where] the Labourer feels himself as independent as the Esq'r. We bow our head to nothing nor nobody excepting the Lord above and the canal bridges as we pass under. I heartily wish I had a came 8 or 10 years ago. I should have a had a good farm of my own before this. If any one, two, or three [or] more should feel inclined to come, I should advise you not to start before March or April for the canals will not be thawd before May and it would be expensive traveling by land. If you here of anyone a coming, tell them to come & see me. I should be happy to see anyone. They cannot go to a better part of the country for Rochester is a very flourishing place. It will be a fine city in a few years. It stands on a great deal more ground than Abingdon but [is] not so thick[ly] inhabited. 20 years ago there was 8 or 10 houses on the ground. There is cotton manufacturing carried on to a very large extent which causes calico to be very cheap. They all use it for shirts & sheets & the farm houses puts one in mind of the old times, as I heard talk of in England in our Grandfather's time. In almost every one I see a spinning wheel to spin wool. They shear their own sheep and they wear it. They make their own candle & soap of the fat of the sheep. . . .

If anyone or more come I'd advise you to buy your provisions up in London. [Do] not trust to anyone near the dock for they will put you off with inferior goods. Be sure and have some rice, oatmeal, rush bread, buiscouts, & good potatoes & plenty of flour for puddings & one person may come very well with 12 £. First he will pay 5£ passage, 10s expenses at the dock, about 2£ for provisions, the remainder will defray the expenses. As soon as landed at New York go to the tow boat office & pay your fare to Rochester, luggage included, & have a receipt for it, for I had to pay for luggage when we got to Rochester. I cannot give you any more information at this time [since] I've not much room left. I must conclude with our love to my Father, Sister, Brother, and all my relations, one and all, hoping you are all as well and as happy as I am at present, and all inquiring friends whose ever they may be,

From your affectionate

Oct. 26 - 1833

J. Webb

A. Webb

The largest number of immigrants of the period hailed from Ireland, and a vivid picture of the destitution from which many of them had fled is afforded by an extract from a letter of 1844 to Henry O'Reilly from a cousin still unhappily residing in Carrickmacross:

We have for every English acre within ten square miles of this town, a human being clothed in rags living in hovels (not fit for Pigs) in the greatest misery and distress, their diet consists principally of potatoes and salt, some *few* have milk, but never more than once or twice in a year do they taste flesh meat, their wages *when they get employment*, which is very seldom is (are) not more than from eight pence to ten pence per day, they *exist* on the produce of an acre or two of land, after paying *land rent*, *bog rent*, cess, tithe &c. &c. Of course the land is very badly cultivated, as they try each year to take all they can out of it and cannot afford manure &c for the ensuing crop.⁴³

News of the dire plight of the famine sufferers in Ireland prompted frequent collections in Rochester for their relief, and support was rallied for the cause of Irish independence. Sums ranging from \$90 to \$2,647.06 were collected from time to time for the Irish.⁴⁴ Aid was likewise extended to German and other immigrants whose numbers increased at the mid-century. Fresh contributions were made to the life of Rochester by these newcomers, though older residents were not always able to appreciate the innovations. Even the first band organized by the music-loving Germans roused the ire of a local editor:

What a conglomeration of uncouth sounds attack the ear of him who dwelleth in the city.—A German Band numbering about six as sturdy and capable Deutchers as have been lately imported, is awakening the echoes within hearing from our sanctum, the instruments which they are employing at this present writing are quite as quaint and out-of-date as the blowers.⁴⁵

That Rochester was attracting ingenious Americans, as well as foreigners of varied skills, was evident on all sides, but of particular interest was an "editorial" in the *Democrat* for December 10, 1835:

SEWING BY MACHINERY

We were yesterday permitted to witness the operation of a very simple machine, which has been constructed within a few months in this city, and which demonstrates the fact that tailoring will not always be done by fingers and thimbles. In its present imperfect state, it takes from three to four stitches a second, and the inventor thinks one may be constructed with improvements which have sug-

gested themselves to his mind, which will more than double this number. But he finds difficulties in the way—similar to those which cramped the genius of Fulton before he found a patron in Livingston:—he has expended his little means in bringing it thus far forward, and must delay further progress for the present, unless he can find assistance by one or more becoming interested with him, who can furnish funds for constructing a machine as near perfection as possible.

Should he fail in finding such assistance here, he designs visiting New-York or Boston to effect that object:—but this would not tell well for the enterprise of Rochester, when the sum required is so trifling.⁴⁶

Unfortunately the editorial was not heeded, and the invention dropped from view for almost a decade, before another young mechanic, Elias Howe, began to work on the problem in Boston. But who was the unnamed Rochester inventor of 1835? As it happened, a colorful young mechanic, Isaac Merritt Singer, was then resident in Rochester, and his inventive skill was already finding expression in a small machine shop, but years later when he gave his attention to the problem of perfecting a sewing machine he made no claim to an interest in it back in 1835 or at any date prior to 1850. Could the unnamed inventor of 1835 have been the mechanical wizard of the day, Walter Hunt of New York, who had developed a "sewing, stitching and seaming" machine in his New York shop between 1832 and 1834, and who may in 1835 have been on a tour attempting to interest some ambitious capitalist in backing its commercial production?⁴⁷ Was it Hunt himself, or a young assistant attempting to duplicate the former's machine, or was it an entirely independent mechanic? Whatever the answer, Rochester missed its opportunity to become the home of the sewing machine, though the number of its successfully developed inventions was ultimately to play a large part in the city's history.

The remarkable story of another young man who landed in Rochester in the mid-thirties is worth passing note. Henry Keep was penniless when he first arrived late in 1835, but a job as driver on the canal and later as hackman in the city provided a chance for small savings. When the depression of 1837 broke and the market value of "foreign" bank notes fell sharply, Keep saw an opportunity to invest his savings in the notes of Canadian and other distant banks, acquired at a fraction of their face value and redeemed at par when presented

at the bank of origin. It was not a unique scheme, for many such strangers were run out of town when their demands for specie threatened a local bank, here as elsewhere; nevertheless Henry Keep garnered a small capital. Popular disapproval of his methods may have spurred his removal, first to Watertown and later to New York City, but his luck held, and after extensive railroad speculations he was able to amass a considerable fortune and win a dubious place in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, along with some eighty more distinguished Rochesterians.⁴⁸

Meanwhile the protracted depression of a century ago accentuated earlier rivalries. One west-side land promoter became indignant over the city's neglect of highway facilities on his side of the river. Since the rivalry was to continue as a major factor in Rochester's development, the letter is perhaps worth quoting at some length:

To the Hon. Mayor and Common Council, and citizens generally of the First, Second, and Third Wards of Rochester:

The object of the few remarks I shall make is to excite and draw your attention to the construction of a Road from the Lower Falls to the head of navigation on the West side of the River.

I have for twenty-two years witnessed with astonishment the enterprise, zeal and ambition of the inhabitants of the East side of the River in establishing, keeping up and supporting a harbor and landing on that side and commanding the Northern trade; and have witnessed with equal astonishment the want of the same enterprise and zeal in the inhabitants of the West side not only in surrendering their legitimate right, but in aiding and assisting from year to year in their unwarrantable improvements. How stood the tables and how have they been turned? Twenty years ago the Harbor was at Handford's [sic] Landing on the West side of the River, consequently the Northern trade kept on that side; State Street was the largest and most business street in Rochester, seeing nearly all the goods—the Mansion House was the largest and most business tavern, also.—But when the Harbor was changed, it was a death blow to State Street; the Mansion House lost nearly half her business consequently the owner was obliged to rent nearly one half the building for other purposes. The East side population and business was but trifling, compared with the West side, and no reasonable man supposed she could be able to live long up to that ratio. But time has shown us differently. They have *totted* the inhabitants over from their legitimate side of business with high Bridges, Harbors, Slides, perpendicular roads down the banks. Railroad Depots, and a chain of Stores across the River on

the Bridge, like a trail of corn to coax the hogs into the pen, till they have nearly equalled us in population and business.

I trust that no gentleman on that side will suppose for a moment I intend charging him with anything wrong, but the reverse. I highly commend their ambition and enterprise, and think it as honorable to them as the stupid lethargy of the inhabitants of this side is disgraceful to us. . . .

In eighteen hundred and twenty-two or three I obtained a grant from the Legislature for a Turnpike [from the west landing, and] . . . got men that I considered the best judges, to examine and estimate the cost. I will name three of them, Samuel Works, Warham Whitney, and Alfred Hovey, the last of whom built our first Aqueduct, and a great portion of the Welland Canal. His opinion was that it could be built according to the requisition of the charter for \$3,500, but said he would agree to build it for \$5,000, and have it completed in six weeks. Suppose it cost the largest sum, what city on earth with half our population would suffer for one hour the boats of their own waters, and also those of a foreign nation, to be kept off from their harbors five miles to save the paltry sum of \$5,000. It is due to the public and private purse of every citizen of these wards, as well as a matter of great convenience, that this road should be made. It is also due to the traveler, the stranger and foreigner on landing from our harbors, that they should have carriages that would convey them with their families or associates with safety to the choice of their lodgings, instead of being obliged to climb almost perpendicular banks with their baggage to the railroad, whose termination still leaves them the agreeable alternative of [walking or finding] another conveyance to the choice of their lodgings.

What real estate is there, particularly in the first and second Wards, that would not be increased in value at least one per cent by the construction of this road, and what fractional part of that one percent would it cost to build it? My views on the means of construction, if thought advisable to construct at all, which I trust no individual can assign a reason for opposing, would be to levy an *equal* tax on the first and second Wards, and *lighter* on the third. . . . But should the majority of the people differ with me in opinion and think the thinly populated north part of the second Ward, who have not a Store or Flouring Mill, and scarcely what can be called a Tavern, and who have been so grossly, unequally, and shamefully taxed for grading and MacAdamizing the road which is altogether more for the benefit of the first Ward and the town of Greece than themselves, should bear the burthen once more—lay it on, but for God's [sake?] spare our lives. . . .

I presume I shall be accused of living in the second Ward, and being partial: if so, so be it. I have ever viewed the second Ward as

possessing more natural advantages than all the rest of the Wards combined; and I trust that sooner or later, notwithstanding we have been kept on the background by the operations above mentioned, those advantages will eventually be improved, and when so the center of Rochester will not be far removed from the Catholic Church, in front of the greatest water power in the United States. . . .

If the above remarks are thought worthy of notice, I wish the Common Council would appoint a committee of from five to twelve to examine the ground and report on the subject, which should be done immediately, as the work can be performed almost exclusively by common laborers and the greatest portion as well done in the winter as any other season. I think this Road must and will be eventually made, as it is the only ground that can be occupied advantageously for the purpose. I also think, as I do of the enlargement of the Erie Canal, the sooner it is done the sooner we shall reap the benefit. The truth of it is, that Rochester is as much in its infancy as it was the hour the first Mill or Store was raised in it.

Gardner McCracken

November 15, 1841 ⁴⁹

Political rivalries were likewise outspoken. Local Whigs frequently held the advantage over their Democratic opponents, at least during the national elections. When they won as usual in November, 1844, only to learn a week later of the triumph of the Democrats throughout the country, their spirits were so downcast and their fears for the future of the country so acute that a large development of new houses planned for Rochester was abandoned and an order for 25,000 barrels of flour cancelled.⁵⁰ Fortunately the expected catastrophe did not materialize; Rochester and the country at large enjoyed a period of renewed prosperity, and local Whigs were able, four years later, to dispell their gloom by a general illumination of the city in honor of General Taylor's election. One observer commented as follows:

The display was exceedingly brilliant. . . . Among the buildings which appeared very beautiful, when all the lights were burning, Mr. Curtiss' Hydraulic building . . . stood out conspicuously. In the whole of the five stories of this immense building, in which there are about one hundred windows, each pane of glass was furnished with a lighted candle, and the entire edifice was enveloped in a blaze of light.⁵¹

Urban Maturity

As the mid-century approached, Rochester enjoyed an increasing measure of urban maturity—after the standards of the day. The 36,403 residents in 1850 entitled it to rank seventeenth among the cities of the Union, and while the dashing spirit of the early days was disappearing a degree of self-assurance developed. Though Buffalo was striding ahead, a local editor could remark with disdain in 1854 that, while Buffalo was annexing Black Rock and other communities, “Not one foot of territory has been annexed to Rochester [since 1850!].”⁵²

A sure sign of the community's increasing age was its new interest in relics of the early days. Thus, a local editor described with some gusto a visit to one of the few log cabins still serving as a dwelling place in the Rochester area in 1840:

Reader, did you ever go on a sleigh-ride, with a sprightly horse and sprightly companion, amid snow-drifts six feet high? If so, you most likely, like us, had a delightful *upset* on the way. These Yankee girls are no cowards in sleighing time. And what rare sport it is, when, in passing a team or turning a corner over you go; girls, cushions, and buffalo skins, together into the snow drift! Half dead with laughter you pick up your companion—all is righted, and you go on again.

We soon reached the residence of our friend, H. N. Langworthy; situated near the banks of the Genesee, about three miles north of this city. The rural cottage is one of the remaining tenements of the Pioneers of this country. Its log walls, whitewashed on the outside, and its snow-covered roof, render it hardly discernable amid the ocean of snow which surrounds it. The inside is the picture of neatness, comfort, and contentment. It is well furnished, and carpeted, and the walls neatly papered. We had not long been seated by the comfortable fire, before the social table was spread; and we sat down to a repast, which would make any true American “Bless his kind stars, and ask no richer fare.” We do not claim to be native born [the writer was English] but we do profess to have a cultivated taste for such things, which entitles our opinion to some weight, and to say nothing of the peach sauce, molasses and other “fixens”, the Johnny cake, and hot pan-cakes, were certainly superior to anything of the kind we have ever tasted.⁵³

Rochesterians were interested in the rural environment of their Genesee hinterland. Flour was still the chief product, and one editor remarked with pleasure in 1846 that "The late census returns show that Monroe County grows more wheat than any other in the State, and more bushels per acre; and that *Wheatland* produces more, per acre, than any other town in the County."⁵⁴ The farm of William Buell, located on the Buffalo Road, one and a half miles west of the city, received lengthy notice in the *Transactions* of the State Agricultural Society. Its 370 acres included 53 acres of woodland and 20 of black-ash bottom land. A three-year rotation of crops, plus a fourth year when a clover crop as well as applications of plaster and manure were plowed under, insured continued fertility. The plow was normally set to cut six or eight inches deep, and two bushels of wheat were sown to an acre, averaging 25 to 40 bushels from the 85 acres normally allotted to that crop. Six milk cows provided for the needs of the farm but 270 sheep, 120 apple trees, all grafted, 100 peach trees, and a dozen plum and cherry trees supplied a surplus for market. Buell's farm cottage boasted a cellar, an out kitchen and wood shed attached, while two other farm houses accommodated tenant families, and three barns sheltered the cattle and necessary implements as well as the crops after harvest. An unusual feature was the account book in which all records of receipts and expenditures were faithfully recorded.⁵⁵

Agricultural fairs were gala occasions at Rochester in these years, but none of the annual county displays rivalled that of 1851 when the State society met in the city. An estimated throng of 100,000 visited the fair, three times the city's normal population, while 482 farmers exhibited a total of 2,014 cattle, 283 displayed grain and 400 merchants and manufacturers exhibited stoves, machinery, and other agricultural products, 357 displayed domestic manufactures, and varied tools of interest to farmers. Several Rochester firms took prizes for their harrows, fanning mills, straw cutters or farm wagons, while the rising local nurserymen, Ellwanger & Barry, dominated the horticultural exhibits. Likewise worthy of note was the \$2 premium won by Mrs. William Burns of Rochester for the best pair of "woolen fringe mittens," while Mrs. G. J. Whitney, wife of a Rochester miller, won \$3 for the best exhibit of ornamental needlework. Frederick Starr received a diploma for his Rochester pianoforte, and

Jacob Gould, ex-mayor of the city, was awarded first prize for his milk cow. Fortunately there were sufficient prizes for outsiders as well, and the great fair was to be long remembered by natives and visitors alike.⁵⁶

But the city was much more than the center of a rich agricultural region. The growth of its urban area had reached a point by 1848 where communication between the various parts of town was sufficient to justify the organization of a second omnibus company, which ran its omnibus, drawn by four fine horses, between the Eagle Hotel at the Four Corners, Mt. Hope Cemetery, the favorite exhibit of the day, and the steamboat landing at Carthage.⁵⁷ The advertisement of "Dr. A. A. Morgan, Dentist," revealed another aspect of the city's growth:

Dr. Morgan will, on the shortest notice, furnish plates from one to an entire set, on fine gold, and fill decayed natural teeth, so as to preserve them during life.

TO THE PROFESSION he would say, he has just received the largest assortment of ALCOCK'S IMPROVED MINERAL TEETH ever opened in this city, and is now prepared to fill orders from 1,000 to 30,000 on short notice, and at New York prices. He can sell them in small lots 30 per cent. less than they can be bought elsewhere in the city. . . .

Remember the DENTAL EMPORIUM, corner of North St. Paul and Main streets. ANSEL A. MORGAN.⁵⁸

Rochester maintained its position as a commercial center, despite the more rapid growth of many western rivals, by the development of a railroad network during the forties. The consolidation of the New York Central lines in 1853 was a boon to the city. Special immigrant rates on the railroads from New York brought a flood of passengers at \$3.67 each, plus \$1.35 for baggage weighing over 100 pounds. The canal rate for the same trip was only \$1.19 and attracted those with large families and much baggage.⁵⁹

The changing character of the city was suggested by the opening of the second gallery of Kelsey's Daguerrian Palace,⁶⁰ as well as by the organization of the Rochester Mutual Health Association by J. W. Stebbins with the object of supplying co-operative health insurance.⁶¹ Meanwhile, as one editor observed, "the advance in rents

has had the effect to compel a good many who have been householders to resort to boarding houses as less expensive, and there are in consequence a considerable number of tenements remaining empty." ⁶² The same editor pointed a characteristic moral to his fellow citizens late that year:

Mark, says a sensible writer, the laboring man who breakfasts at six, and then walks perhaps two or three miles to his work. He is full of health and a stranger to doctors. Mark, on the other hand, our clerk who takes tea and toast at eight, and gets down to the store at nine, or half-past. He is a pale effeminate creature, full of sarsaparilla and patent worm medicine, and pills and things. ⁶³

Perhaps no other detail more fittingly illustrates the growing urban complexity than the tale of the town clocks. The works of the first tower clock on the First Presbyterian Church had been installed in 1831, but the rapid growth of the city made it impossible for many either to see its face or hear it strike. A large, four dial clock was accordingly purchased by the city and installed in the brick tower of the Second Presbyterian Church in 1847, and the east siders acquired a time piece of their own with the installation of a clock on St. Paul's Church tower the next year. Suggestions that these clocks be illuminated by gas burners at night produced no results, but a more difficult problem was emerging as the several public clocks failed to agree. Action was finally taken, appointing an official charged to keep the various city clocks in agreement. The editor of the *Union* felt impelled in 1854 to congratulate the city on the regulation of its clocks, declaring that it was a "great convenience to the laboring portion of the community." ⁶⁴

No doubt the problem was complicated by the fact that the old simple standard of sun time was now challenged, both by railroad time, resulting from the consolidation of the New York Central lines in 1853, and by telegraph time, available after the completion of the line to Albany in 1846. No hint is provided as to which standard triumphed, and meanwhile we have reached the bottom of our scrap file and must bring this rambling account to a close.

NOTES

1. Samson Scrapbook, No. 43, p. 66. Samson copied the letter from an article by Ansel J. McCall in the *Bath Plaindealer* where it appeared sometime in the 1890's.
2. See the Reminiscences of Stephen Tucker, made in 1860, in the "Junior Pioneer Association Records of the Committee of Historical Collections, Contributions and Reminiscences." MS. in the Rochester Historical Society.
3. Oliver Phelps to Justin Ely, Sept. 9, 1797. Phelps and Gorham Papers. Photostats, in the University of Rochester.
4. Blake McKelvey, "Indian Allan's Mills," *Rochester History*, Oct. 1939.
5. Charles Carroll to Col. Rochester, Williamsburgh, July 8, 1817, Rochester Letters. MSS. in Roch. Hist. Soc.
6. *Ontario Repository*, Jan. 23, 1810.
7. Harriett J. Naylor, ed., "And This Was Rochester! Excerpts from the Old Citizen Letters of Edwin Scranton", *Rochester History*, Jan., 1942.
8. N. Y. Senate *Journal* (1823), pp. 150, 178, 228.
9. Dorothy S. Truesdale, "Main Street Bridge," *Rochester History*, April, 1941.
10. Guy Markham's reminiscences, quoted in the *Post Express*, Jan. 3, 1891.
11. Hervey Ely to Col. Rochester, Rochester, Mar. 12, 1823, Rochester Letters.
12. *Ontario Repository*, Feb. 7, 1815.
13. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1815.
14. *Ibid.*, May 28, Dec. 10, 25, 1816.
15. Junior Pioneer Association, Record Book, p. 14. Pierson dates the visit in 1816, but neither the tavern nor the plow were in existence until 1818 or 1819.
16. William Atkinson to John Atkinson, Rochester, March 1, 1817. Typed copy in Roch. Hist. Soc.
17. Jesse Hawley to Col. Rochester, Canandaigua, Aug. 2, 1817, Rochester Letters.
18. *Monroe Republican*, Dec. 11, 1821.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Contract between A. Reynolds and John Swift, Feb. 5, 1821, Reynolds Papers, MSS. in Roch. Hist. Soc.
21. Account Book of the *Michigan*, 1824; Way Bills of the *Rochester*, 1823-1825. MSS. in Roch. Hist. Soc.
22. William Sisson, "Journal of a Trip from Lyons to Vermont, New York [City], and back in 1831," MS. in Rochester Public Library.
23. An excerpt from the Diary of Mr. [later Rev.] Joseph H. Nichols of New Haven, may be found in Samson's Note Book XI:96.
24. *Rochester Album*, June 20, 1826.
25. S. A. Ferrall, *A Ramble of Six Thousand Miles Through the United States of America* (London, 1832), p. 27.
26. "Notes of a Tour Through the Western Part of the State of New York," *The Ariel* (Philadelphia, 1829-1830), pp. 45-49.
27. *Rochester Telegraph*, Dec. 5, 1820.
28. *Ibid.*, May 16, 1826.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Rochester Observer*, Aug. 13, 1830.
31. N. Y. Assembly *Doc.* (1832), No. 2, p. 13.
32. *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 18, 19, 1833.

33. *Journal of the Proceedings of the 50th Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York* (N. Y., 1835), p. 62; *ibid.* (1836), pp. 75-76.
34. Jesse Hawley to Abelard Reynolds, Rochester, Jan. 24, Feb. 15, 1827, Autograph Letter File, Roch. Hist. Soc.
35. *Rochester Mercury*, Jan. 23, 1827. See the Newspaper Index, Roch. Pub. Lib., for an extended listing of accidents.
36. Minutes of the Trustees, April 10, 12, 1832.
37. Harriet A. Weed, ed., *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1883), p. 99.
38. *The Gem and Ladies Amulet*, Oct. 7, 1837.
39. *Democrat*, July 3, 1839; *Advertiser*, Nov. 11, 1842; *Post Express*, Feb. 14, 1885.
40. *Observer*, Feb. 19, 1830. The *Observer*, quoting the *Courier*, blamed destitution on the "legalized Drunkard Manufacturies."
41. *Rochester Republican*, Oct. 26, 1848; "Old Citizen Letters," Scrapbook in Roch. Hist. Soc., p. 89.
42. Typed copy in the Roch. Hist. Soc.
43. Frank O'Reilly to Henry O'Reilly, Carrickmacross, July 26, 1844, O'Reilly Doc., No. 2295.
44. *Democrat*, Feb. 15, 1847; *Republican*, June 1, 1847; *Genesee Olio*, Aug. 26, 1848.
45. *Ibid.* Sept. 23, 1848.
46. *Democrat*, Dec. 10, 1835.
47. Frederick L. Lewton, "The Servant in the House: A Brief History of The Sewing Machine," *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution* (1929), I:559-575; Charles G. Abbott, *Great Inventions* (Smithsonian Scientific Series, Washington, 1932), pp. 247-265; *Dictionary of American Biography*.
48. *Ibid.*, X:286, and passim.
49. *Democrat*, Nov. 18, 1841.
50. *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1844.
51. Raymond Scrapbook, p. 64. Roch. Hist. Soc.
52. *Rochester Daily Union*, July 17, 1854.
53. *New Genesee Farmer*, Feb., 1840, p. 25.
54. *Genesee Farmer*, Jan. 1846, p. 8.
55. *Transactions of the New York State Agricultural Society for 1845* (Albany, 1846), V:187-192.
56. *Ibid.*, 1851 (Albany, 1852), XI:16-108, ff.
57. *Advertiser*, May 9, 10, 1848; *Democrat* July 7, 1848; Dec. 26, 1850.
58. *Genesee Farmer*, May, 1850, p. 124.
59. *Hunt's Merchants Magazine* (1851), XXV:503-505.
60. *Union*, Mar. 28, 1854.
61. *Rochester Mutual Health Association* (1851).
62. *Democrat*, Apr. 29, 1853.
63. *Ibid.*, Aug. 17, 1853.
64. *Ibid.*, Mar. 25, 1847, Aug. 23, 1849; *Advertiser*, Oct. 16, 1847; *Genesee Olio*, Sept. 23, 1848; *Union* June 20, 1854.