

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

Edited by DEXTER PERKINS, *City Historian*  
and BLAKE MCKELVEY, *Assistant City Historian*

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## Civic Developments of Rochester's First Half Century 1817-1867

BY BLAKE MCKELVEY

The growth of Rochester, while it has taken place within the comparatively brief period of a century and a quarter, has presented the frequent necessity for drastic revisions in civic organization. Founded during an age when villages of less than two thousand inhabitants were the prevailing municipal units, Rochester had scarcely been provided with suitable institutions according to the pattern of the day when the village fathers were compelled to replace them in 1834 with an organization capable of performing the essential functions of a growing city. The expanding Flower City made rapid strides in civic developments until checked by the protracted depression which started in the late thirties. During the economy-minded years that followed, Rochester never quite caught up with its civic problems, at least not until the renewed vitality of the Flower City, in the decades following the Civil War, surged ahead toward the provision of many long-needed services—achievements which must be reserved for later study. But the developments of Rochester's first half century, if far from adequate, throw much light on the problems of a growing community and compare not unfavorably with the accomplishments of other urban centers of the day.

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## Village Functions

A few essential community functions appeared even before the settlement at the Genesee Falls had taken root. The opening of roads leading into the area from the south and east and the building of the first bridge necessarily preceded permanent settlement. These tasks were sufficiently advanced before 1812 by the township and county authorities bordering the lower Genesee to make possible the permanent settlement of Rochester that year. The interruption of a frontier war actually spurred the improvement of roads and the provision of mail routes, not to mention the organization of militia companies. Several other functions, more exclusively the concern of the new settlement, likewise appeared before village incorporation in 1817, but it was in this year that the settlers first tackled their civic problem in earnest. The early solutions soon proved inadequate, however, prompting some citizens to urge the community's immediate incorporation as a city; yet the majority chose instead to revamp the village functions in order to meet the larger problems of a boom town.

Perhaps the first organized community action in the falls settlement was that resulting in the provision of Gates District School No. 2 (later Rochester No. 1). The district was organized late in 1813, and despite some opposition a one-room frame building was ready for use by the next fall. Part of the dispute over the cost of the first school building grew out of confusion over the district's boundaries, and those settlers located east of the river, as well as those at the main falls a half mile north of the village, quickly provided schools of their own, Brighton No. 4 and Gates No. 10.

Yet even the early settlers were drawn together as one community on numerous occasions. The opening of a postoffice just west of the bridge late in 1813 brought the scattered residents out to meet the post rider at least twice a week after 1815, and soon that experience became a daily affair. The residents needed no second call when the flood waters of the Genesee threatened the bridge in 1817. A protecting embankment was quickly built, thus saving the community's most important public structure. Another bond appeared when the first burial occurred in the public graveyard, but in

this case, as with the school, the plot was donated by the proprietors of the hundred-acre tract, and the community's only responsibility was for its maintenance.

The enterprising citizens were not minded, however, to rely upon the generosity of absentee proprietors for the satisfaction of their community needs. A Village Incorporation Committee, formed early in 1817, drafted a petition which Colonel Rochester (then still resident at Bloomfield) carried to Albany in time to secure passage of the act of incorporation on March 21st. Quite against the wishes of those settlers at the east end of the bridge, the river was established as the eastern boundary of the 655-acre village tract. Despite the exclusion of numerous east-siders, the village numbered approximately seven hundred residents, though the right to vote, as restricted under state law, was limited to possibly one hundred adult male freeholders to the value of twenty pounds or renters who paid forty shillings for their homes and who could show a residence in the county during the previous six months. The number of voters was sufficient, nevertheless, to prompt a spirited contest for office, and when a group of self-respecting Yankee merchants prepared a slate excluding all mechanics, the indignant artisans, despite threats against their jobs, hastily drafted a rival slate which successfully carried the day.

The charter of 1817 provided a form of government similar to that of other recently incorporated villages—Brooklyn, Bath, and Geneva, among others granted charters the year before. Chief authority resided in the town meeting, which elected seventeen officers (including five trustees), voted necessary taxes, not to exceed \$1,000 a year, and exercised carefully limited powers. The trustees had authority to adopt bylaws regulating fire hazards, nuisances, streets, markets, and some forty related matters.

The village trustees hastened at early meetings to adopt several necessary regulations. The first bylaws, adopted in June, 1817, provided that streets should not be cluttered with building materials or used for the racing of horses. Fines were prescribed for permitting hogs or cows to run at large and for throwing dead animals into the streets. The fire hazard prompted the requirement that each house be equipped with a fire bucket, that chimneys and stove pipes be kept clean. Hunting, firing of guns, and bathing in the river (except after

dark) were prohibited within the village limits. A license was required to operate a liquor store or to slaughter animals within the bounds.

Several of these problems soon demanded further action, and the inhabitants assembled in a second village meeting to appropriate \$350 for general expenses and necessary village improvements. Suitable books were acquired for the village records, fire hooks and ladders were ordered to supplement the efforts of the bucket brigade, and the swamp back of Christopher's tavern on Carroll (State) Street was drained. A secure pound was needed for stray cattle pending the collection of fines against their owners. The unorganized citizens' bucket brigade gave place in October to a fire company appointed by the trustees. Six months later similar action provided a citizens' night patrol. But before the village could function satisfactorily it required an official seal, and the proper symbol for an enterprising town appeared to be an arm and a hammer.

## Boom Town Problems

The simple solutions and modest expenditures of the first year soon proved inadequate. Each of the above-mentioned functions quickly developed into a major village activity, and new problems pressed for solution. As the time and energy required of the various officers made some compensation desirable, fees were prescribed for most services, while an honorarium of ten dollars a year was provided for each trustee. The tax voted for the second year reached the \$1,000 statutory maximum. Fortunately a new county was formed in 1821 with its headquarters at Rochester, where the new officials promptly assumed large responsibilities and speeded the development of community functions.

The fire hazard quickly established itself as the most urgent village concern. The burning of Francis Brown's mill early in 1818 prompted the inhabitants to purchase a fire engine—a hand pump attached to a tank into which water had to be fed by the bucket brigade. When the first real test came in December, 1818, the stream of water proved to be insufficient to reach the second story, and by morning four buildings near the Four Corners, including the first newspaper office, had gone up in smoke. The trustees quickly adopted new regulations, requiring householders to provide one fire bucket for every two fire-

places and a ladder sufficient to reach the top of the building. A shed erected by the fire company for the protection of its engine stood on the public square until that site was accepted for the courthouse, when the "engine house" was relocated near the central water trough erected for the use both of fire fighters and of thirsty horses.

The record of a half-dozen fires in 1821 was reduced by vigilant care during the next year, but by 1823 it became evident that one gasping hand pump would no longer suffice. The inhabitants convened that December to consider the recommendations of the trustees for two new "engines," a length of leather hose to supply at least one engine with water from the "reservoir," and a set of ladders mounted on wheels. Advocates of economy cut the order to one new engine and a ladder truck. A second fire company was formed, and two years later a fire chief undertook to harmonize the activities of the rival companies. A more vigorous organization of this vital civic function waited upon further amendment of the charter.

The character of several of these early fires, arousing suspicion of incendiarism, suggested that an efficient police might help to correct the evil. The citizens' patrol, appointed early in 1818, failed to give full satisfaction, and, with many of its members seeking release from their thankless responsibilities, the inhabitants in December, 1819, voted eighty dollars to employ a night watch for as many months as the amount would allow.

A major breeding ground for the disorderly elements appeared in the "groceries" (saloons) and gaming rooms from which doubtful characters emerged to disturb the community. An attempt in 1817 to strike this evil at the source by collecting license fees from the groceries apparently failed, for fines had to be levied two years later on those operating without a license. In 1823, licenses were again required of those operating groceries, billiard tables, or ninepin alleys, while showmen had to pay ten dollars to perform in the village for one week or less. Workmen building the first stone aqueduct to carry the canal across the river not only provided a unique center of interest but added to the turbulent life of the boom town.

The rapid growth of the village brought public health problems to the fore. The drainage problem became more pressing as the settlement spread over its prehistoric swamp site and as the newer and

more substantial houses were provided with cellars. Efforts to regulate the disposal of refuse and the building of "necessaries" (outhouses) helped to keep disease under control, but the popular demand for a sewer down Buffalo Street had to await the grant of larger taxing powers. The generous flow at an old Indian spring supplied the settlers with fresh water until 1820, when several private wells were dug, adequately meeting the needs of the villagers.

Some community improvements encountered fiscal checks. A new and larger village cemetery, located over a mile out Buffalo Street, was easily paid for by the sale of the original plot at the booming prices then current, and sufficient funds remained to purchase a public hearse so that the dead could be carried to their last resting place in proper state. But when the major burden of a new bridge to replace the frame structure of 1812 was levied on the village, loud protests forced delay and the extensive repairs substituted for a new bridge were not completed until late in 1824. In similar fashion, much-desired street improvements were postponed in the absence of authority to levy a tax for the purpose, yet the trustees did act to order property holders on the four principal streets to build sidewalks and erect hitching posts at their own expense. To finish off these improvements, the trustees voted \$150 for crosswalks at the central four corners, and provided for the erection of oil lamps at both ends of the bridge to be lit on dark nights in order to safeguard late travelers from plunging into the river.

## Monroe County Established

The creation of Monroe County with its seat in Rochester was of primary importance to the civic life of the community. Before 1821 the villagers had to journey to Batavia, the Genesee County seat, for court functions, while settlers at the east end of the bridge had to resort to Canandaigua, seat of Ontario County. Frequently a tedious trip over mud-clogged roads to both county seats was found necessary, thus consuming several days in the process of settling negotiations between neighbors at the Genesee Falls. The long campaign for a new county began in 1815, but the opposition of Canandaigua and Batavia blocked action. Finally Rochester's growth as well as her political alliance with men up the Genesee who likewise desired an independent

county, and with men along the lake to the east who had similar ambitions, resulted in the reduction of the old counties and the creation of Monroe and Livingston in 1821 and Wayne in 1823. Plans were soon ready in Rochester for a graceful courthouse erected at a cost of approximately \$7,000 on the central plot donated by Rochester, Fitzhugh, and Carroll. The modest stone building, boasting two Ionic porticoes, a belfry and cupola, added not only charm to the community but dignity to its civic affairs.

The construction of a jail at a cost of \$3,674 focused attention on the crime problem. Various major and minor offenders within the county received at least thirty criminal sentences from the Circuit Court in 1823 and 1824. Concern for the community's safety, increased by the presence of a convict force laboring on the aqueduct, prompted an expenditure of \$200 for the night watch in 1823. When escapes from the jail and the convict camp added to the anxiety, one local editor declared that "probably no place in the Union the size of Rochester is so much infested with the dregs and outcasts of society as is this village." A "stepping mill" (treadmill), proposed for the village, never materialized, but a Vigilant Society was formed by a score of young men who volunteered to make the nightly rounds during the balmy season and thus save the town some expense.

### Village Institutions Outgrown

The need for more adequate civic functions, resulting in part from the rapid growth of the town, gave rise to frequent demands for a city charter. Several of the trustees, burdened with increased civic responsibilities, were heartily in favor of urban status, but many citizens hesitated to delegate the taxing power to a group of aldermen. Accordingly, when some three or four hundred gathered to consider the issue at a public meeting in December, 1825, the proposal was defeated. Instead, an application was reluctantly endorsed for a revised village charter, dividing the town into five wards, raising the tax limit to \$2,000, and extending the powers of the trustees. Twenty-four village officers had now to be elected from the several wards, with their authority extended over a total of forty-nine specific matters. The object of improving the village, both physically and morally, was evident from the inclusion of authority to build sewers as well as to regulate the sale of "spirituous liquors."

Despite the desires of the villagers, Rochester was rapidly developing the proportions and the problems of a small city. With a population nearing 7,000 in the summer of 1826, all rivals in the state west of Albany were surpassed—not only in numbers but in the urgency of village affairs. The newly elected trustees soon found themselves overburdened with pressing problems. In place of the leisurely meetings held once every two or three months during previous years, the trustees gathered for busy sessions every week or so and sometimes twice a week. For this extensive public service they received the modest reward of fifteen dollars a year, yet the dignities of office still attracted leading citizens.

The trustees' first task was to formulate a policy respecting groceries and theatrical performances. A new theater in process of construction, supported by local capital, a traveling performer requesting leave to show a caravan of living animals in the old circus building, and the promise that other theatrical companies would shortly visit the most thriving town west of Albany, forced a decision. Unfortunately the trustees were scarcely in agreement themselves, and after rejecting a motion to prohibit theater licenses altogether they compromised with a \$150 annual license fee. New modifications soon proved necessary, and this issue continued to perplex successive boards.

Ordinances for the exclusion of billiard tables and other gambling devices and for the licensing and regulation of groceries produced a similar division of opinion. The community had grown to the point where the number of travelers and other strangers thronging the taverns, eager to relax around billiard tables or to purchase whiskey even on the Sabbath, made it difficult for the respectable villagers to maintain all the civic regulations. It was particularly difficult to enforce the Sabbath closing rule on groceries or to subdue the canal boatmen who passed through Rochester on that day. Groceries were now encountered at almost every turn. In 1827 nearly a hundred licenses were granted, netting, together with the occasional fines, a considerable sum for the treasury.

Among other problems pressing for attention was the fire hazard, evident in the destruction of half a dozen or so buildings each year in the mid-twenties. The periodic inspection of fireplaces and flues by two fire wardens appointed for each ward enforced preventive



regulations, but the villagers were soon prompted to send east for an improved fire engine and three hundred feet of leather hose to equip a third volunteer company in 1827. That same year saw an increase in the night watch to ten men—as much in the interest of fire watching as crime detection.

Public health considerations impelled the trustees to subsidize the digging of neighborhood wells. More stringent regulations of “necessaries” required the construction of stone vaults and the frequent removal after dark of the refuse boxes. Pig sties were excluded from the central part of the village, and the location of butcher shops became a matter of public concern. This last health problem, coupled with the complaints of central storekeepers against the obstruction of their street fronts by an increasing number of hucksters, focused attention on the community’s need for a public market, and after considerable delay a market building was constructed out over the river along the northern side of the bridge.

In more than one respect the market proved a focal point in Rochester’s development. With its construction a bold step was taken in the advance of store fronts out over the river to join the two sides of town (357 Brighton acres east of the river had been included within the village limits in 1823). When the construction cost of the market soared to three times the original appropriation of \$1,000, the trustees were forced to issue market stock, thus discovering the possibility of exceeding their tax limits under the charter. The discovery was to come in handy in connection with street and sewer improvements within another decade, but in the meantime the cost of these projects had to be assessed on the adjacent property holders. Two days of street labor by every male resident, plus an additional day for every \$300 in real property, provided manpower for minimum road repairs, while the Buffalo Street sewer and several less pretentious ditches, as well as approximately two miles of additional sidewalks, added to the community benefits during the late twenties. The location of street signs at prominent corners in December, 1828, marked public recognition of the growing proportions of the village.

Despite recurrent desires for a substantial town schoolhouse, supervision over the common schools remained in the hands of the school districts. The three district schools of 1818 increased to ten

within a decade, enrolling approximately two thousand children, but the community's growth was so rapid that a similar array of private schools could not accommodate the remaining children of school age within the village. It was not until 1828 that the first effort to provide a public high school achieved success, and unfortunately this ambitious undertaking of two east-side school districts fell an early victim of the local recession at the close of the twenties.

The need for larger powers and a more efficient management of community affairs could not be denied. Yet the lack of precedents for such rapid growth as Rochester was experiencing, coupled with the brief period of hard times in 1829, defeated successive movements for a city charter. The trustees meanwhile stretched their existing authority, ordering the further extension of sidewalks and the opening of additional sewers at the expense of adjacent property holders, but little could be done for the streets. The numbering of the houses on the principal streets late in 1829 and the erection of a dozen oil lamps at major street intersections provided useful improvements, but lack of authority frustrated plans for a public water system. Makeshift "reservoirs," constructed of wooden hogsheads buried at places where rain water would keep them reasonably filled, sought to meet the emergency needs of the fire companies, which increased to six by 1834, but when a fire broke out on the bridge in January of that year the inadequate equipment of the best organized force in the village was revealed. Among the buildings destroyed in the \$100,000 fire was the public market.

The self-restraint developed in civic affairs during the early thirties expressed itself in more rigid regulation of groceries and public amusements. The annual license fees were increased from five to forty dollars between 1828 and 1832, sharply reducing the number of liquor dealers, while costly licenses and fines restricted the visits of theatrical troupes and banned gambling devices. Unfortunately the pious hope that a puritanical community would be safeguarded against the scourge of cholera, then ravaging the wicked cities of Europe and Asia, proved illusory when the plague finally reached Rochester in 1832. The hastily organized board of health improvised a hospital or pest house in an old cooper shop, and valiant efforts were made to assist and then bury the victims, who totaled 118 within three months.

The more serious result of the economic recession and the ravages of cholera—namely the increased number of homeless children and destitute families—was not at the time considered a village concern. Monroe County provided an almshouse in 1826, and a measure of outdoor relief was distributed, but no care was yet available for orphans, of whom an increasing number appeared in the village. The county opened a new and secure jail in 1833, established new court functions, and projected various road and bridge improvements. But even the county failed to exercise any measure of control over the decentralized district schools. Indeed the only promising developments in the educational field were made by semi-private schools, notably the Monroe Academy in Henrietta and the Rochester Seminary which took over the operation of the old High School building on the eastern edge of the village.

### Flour City Problems

The need for a more responsible community leadership finally became imperative. A renewed movement for a city charter in 1832 was defeated only at the last moment by a disagreement as to the proper tax limit. But by 1834 even the economy-minded advocates of a \$5,000 annual tax maximum could not deny the necessity for larger outlays, and the charter was finally secured, establishing the City of Rochester with generous bounds that included a total of 4,819 acres and numbered a population of approximately 12,000. The taxing powers of the City Council were limited to \$8,000 a year, with various specific exceptions, and many new powers were granted to the aldermen, among them the duty of choosing a mayor.

The adoption of a city charter made possible more effective action by the community. New issues soon developed, however, notably a rivalry between the mayor and the council, but at least during the city's first years numerous improvements were carried forward. Unfortunately the more aggravated problems of the depression years following 1837 proved too much for the inexperienced authorities, and an increasingly hesitant and conservative attitude characterized civic authorities during the forties. A divided responsibility between the city and county officials on the one hand, and between public and private institutions on the other, further obstructed advance. Only

in the educational field was a centralized authority achieved in the forties, but other civic functions began to catch up with the educational advances during the more expansive fifties.

An unexpected rivalry between the mayor and the council soon burst into view. The Whigs who dominated the first council, as staunch opponents of the liquor traffic, chose a strict temperance man, Jonathan Child, as first mayor. Stiff license fees were demanded and the restrictions were so drastically enforced that the Whigs lost the next election to Democrats who favored a more liberal license policy. The mayor's term carried over for half a year in order to provide a measure of continuity, with the result that Mayor Child, finding himself obliged to sign licenses issued by the new aldermen, chose to resign instead.

For several years the bars were down, not only for grocery and tavern licenses, but for many other restraints of the previous period. Popular indifference rather than hostile regulations defeated repeated attempts to revive the theater, but an eager following encouraged various circus troupes to make more than two-score visits to Rochester during these years. Fiscal restraints were likewise lifted as numerous public improvements were called for. While the first council displayed a measure of caution, appropriating but slightly more than double the tax maximum, successive councils plunged more deeply into the red, until a gross debt of \$126,000 was piled up in 1839.

Yet the fiscal policy was not quite so reckless as the statistics would suggest, for substantial improvements were provided in the several miles of street pavements and new sewers, in the reconstructed Main Street bridge and the new public market. At least the last expenditure of \$35,000 proved sound, even from a fiscal point of view, as the stall rentals more than recompensed the city within a few years. The same could be said of the investment of \$10,000 in a public hay scales, as well as the purchase, at \$100 each, of the approximately fifty-four acres which formed the nucleus of Mt. Hope Cemetery. No similar cash return could be collected from those using other improvements of the day, and many of the special assessments, against which loans for street and sewer improvements were made, could never be collected, but the city's injury, had these improvements been longer neglected, would not have seemed intangible. In a more direct re-

spect the large outlays of 1837, 1838, and 1839, maintaining the improvement schedules launched during the previous two years, considerably alleviated the hardships suffered by the poor during the depression years.

Yet, as the depression dragged on, the desire for economy gained sway, bringing the city's expenditures down sharply in 1840 from \$109,000 to \$56,000 and holding them within modest limits for nearly a decade. The refusal at the same time to advance the tax limit to a point that would have made possible a balanced budget partly defeated the effort to liquidate the city debt. The total stood at \$66,676 in 1850, half that of 1839; nevertheless, viewed as a per capita debt, it had been brought down from \$6.68 to \$1.83 per person. Meanwhile the per capita expenditures were pared from the \$5.80 of 1839 to \$2.66 in 1849, when the total outlay stood at \$91,000, approximately \$18,000 less than a decade before, despite a three-fourths growth in population.

These drastic economies had their direct effect on the community services. Street and sewer improvements practically stopped as the small annual expenditures on these functions barely maintained them in a state of repair. By 1848, when clogging sewers compelled some action, the mayor was surprised to discover that no sewer map had been prepared and that the exact location and course of some of the sewers had been forgotten. A campaign for shade trees added much to the city streets at no cost to the city, and the number of street lights increased to sixty during the mid-forties, yet the aldermen failed to adopt a proposal that Falls Field, the meadow on the east bank overlooking the main falls, be acquired and preserved as a public promenade. Small sums were expended for fencing the several public squares previously donated to the city, but the city lost an opportunity to safeguard its choicest park site when the chance to buy Falls Field slipped by.

Economy likewise blocked each successive proposal for the construction of water works, though in the long run the community paid dearly for this failure. The arguments pro and con were heated and protracted. 'Not only will the water rates carry the capital charges,' Mayor Johnson, the venturesome engineer, urged, 'but they will be regained through economies in the fire insurance rates.' He might have

foretold greater fire losses than the proposed outlays, but the average voter was inclined to take his chances. The volunteer fire companies increased to ten, and several improved engines were purchased from the factory of a local Whig leader. Disorderly riots between the rival companies prompted a temperance campaign during which sixteen firemen took the pledge, but the fires continued to rage, destroying many substantial buildings before the mid-century.

The impasse sprang in part from the lack of continuous leadership able to initiate long-range programs. The practice of passing on the honors of office resulted in the shifting of responsibilities. Two-year terms for councilmen, provided in 1837, brought little relief as the number of these officials increased with the city's expansion. By the mid-century the number of local city officials topped one hundred, most of them changing every year or two. Indeed the only long official terms occurred in the county and state judgeships located in the community, and here, despite the prevailing Whig sentiment of Rochester, able Democratic appointments established a high record for public service. The number of aldermen reached eighteen, but the total number of men who served in this capacity during the city's first fifteen years exceeded one hundred. It was small wonder that Rochester's civic development was occasionally halted or thrown into reverse amidst the resulting babble of opinion.

## Divided Responsibility

Divided responsibility for a variety of civic functions occasioned some inefficiency, but in several instances more effective measures were taken by county, state, and charitable agencies than could have been expected of the municipal authorities of the day.

Following the close of its boom days, good order and restraint generally characterized the citizens of Rochester. The night watch was gradually enlarged, and the cost increased from \$451 in 1834 to \$3,953 by 1849 when one full-time constable appeared on day duty. The Watch Books kept by these officers show a variety of petty offenders booked for vagrancy, drunkenness, keeping a bawdy house, or selling liquors without a license. The county sheriff and his deputies apprehended the more serious criminals, who increased in num-

ber until the sixty cells of the jail were overcrowded. An average of forty criminal convictions in the county courts in the mid-thirties increased to one hundred by the mid-century. Rochester itself was the scene of two sensational murders in the late thirties, and, despite the spectacle provided at their hanging in the jail yard, others occurred during the forties, but the city fortunately escaped the serious anti-Catholic and antislavery riots that stirred other communities during the forties and fifties.

The care of the poor became a more difficult problem as the depression dragged on into the forties. Nothing came of the city's effort to establish a workhouse, but outdoor relief, nonexistent in Rochester before 1834, averaged \$5,000 a year during the forties and mounted to \$13,420 by the close of the decade. The almshouse, maintained by the county just south of the city, remained the chief haven for the destitute. Some opportunity was provided for the removal of a few insane persons, as well as the deaf, dumb, and blind, to the state institutions recently opened for these unfortunates in the East, but frequently they had to share pot luck with the two hundred-odd inmates of the almshouse. Fortunately the establishment of the Rochester Orphan Asylum as a Protestant charity in 1837 and of the Catholic Asylum in 1842 made possible the removal of most children from the almshouse and jail.

Public health presented another instance of divided responsibility. The city board of health was dependent on the county supervisors for the payment of its bills. Little activity was evident in this field after the cholera epidemic of 1832 until the threat of a new epidemic appeared in 1848. Hasty efforts to clean up the city, to register all sick persons, and to open a hospital proved unsuccessful. New sewers could not be dug overnight and the attempt to clear out the old ditches was balked in some cases when the outlets could not be located. After terrified neighbors burned the first building acquired for a hospital, the location of a suitable shelter was delayed until the plague arrived in June, 1849. The early discovery that most of the victims appeared among the crowded residents of unsanitary "tenements" prompted the board of health to condemn and burn a few of these buildings. The board's effort boosted the public health expenditures, nonexistent in the years between 1843 and 1848, to nearly \$500 that year and about

\$5,000 in 1849. The total number of deaths attributed to the plague reached 161 before it subsided in September, but as the city's population had now passed 35,000 the ratio was much less appalling than in many other cities.

Neither the city nor the county wished to shoulder the financial burden of a new Main Street bridge or a new courthouse, though both projects had become essential. The city, which could not afford to permit its principal bridge to fall into ruin, took the initiative in contracting for a new structure in 1837, but the supervisors ultimately paid most of the bill. The county, still the big brother in local governmental affairs, reluctantly faced the necessity of erecting a larger courthouse. Various makeshifts were tried, as first the city offices and then special court functions were moved out of the quaint but overcrowded structure erected in 1822. When, finally, the need for a new building was admitted by all, a modest plan was drawn and a structure to cost \$30,000 projected. Fortunately, popular indignation at this short-sighted economy forced a revision of plans, and by the mid-century a quite substantial courthouse, adequate to house city as well as county offices, was under construction on the old site.

## Educational Advance

Public education, the one civic field in which centralized responsibility was achieved, enjoyed the most creditable advance. Although the aldermen received some supervisory authority under the city charter, the state of the district schools appeared anything but encouraging during the protracted battle for the creation of an independent and centralized school board. When in 1841, after the newly conscious laboring groups added their support to the agitation of educators and humanitarians, that struggle finally succeeded, the way was cleared for the erection within the next three years of nine new buildings, several of them of brick, at a total cost of \$28,000. The registration mounted from the fifteen hundred of 1838 to over four thousand by 1844 when forty-four teachers in fifteen schools received salaries averaging \$254 a year.

The demand for economy eventually curbed even the educational reformers. Efforts to expand the program of studies to include music



and accounting as well as the more traditional instruction in the three R's, algebra, history, geography, botany, grammar, and natural philosophy, met resistance. The occasional evening classes of the early forties had to be sacrificed during the lean economy years that followed. The desire for a public high school was effectively blocked throughout these years by the economy forces, but the excellent standards developed in the Rochester Collegiate Institute (successor to the Rochester Seminary in the old High School building) and in several private academies for girls partly filled the gap.

For the first time public authorities took cognizance of the community's book needs when in the early forties the small district school libraries were made available for adult use. But Rochester's library facilities would have been meager indeed had it not been for the efforts of several private associations to maintain book collections. Consolidated under the name Athenaeum and Young Men's Association in 1839, a city library of two thousand books was maintained for several years and formed the nucleus of a larger Athenaeum and Mechanics Association library opened in 1849. By this date a state law library had likewise been located in the city, but the civic authorities themselves had not yet become aware of any responsibility in this field.

## Progress in the Fifties

Rochester was acquiring the character of a mature city by the mid-century, and while its civic functions were not as adequate as were its cultural and economic activities, yet the fifties saw a steady advance in civic responsibility and municipal improvement. Less time was given to the old effort to curb groceries, game rooms, and theaters, all of which now gained a recognized place in the urban community. More generous appropriations followed the drastic revision of the assessment rolls in 1851 which doubled the community's property valuation. An increase in the municipal powers under the 1850 charter and the grant of a larger share of this authority to the mayor proved advantageous, while these years likewise saw the successful development in Rochester of new state and local institutions destined to contribute to the area's welfare.

A renewed enterprise marked the field of public works. Not only did the city shoulder the main portion of the cost of the new courthouse but it assumed the initiative in the mid-fifties when renewed repairs were needed on Main Street bridge. The ravages of a third cholera epidemic finally prompted the authorities to tackle the sewer problem, though the failure even then to adopt a comprehensive plan limited the usefulness of the \$55,000 sewer improvements of the mid-fifties. An attempt to find a more suitable paving material than the loose gravel used under the macadam plan—which proved especially unsuited as a covering in the old marsh areas scattered about the city—resulted in experiments with wooden brick and stone block pavements as well as plank roads. Though none of these pavings gave entire satisfaction, Rochester streets of the mid-fifties compared favorably with those of many other cities.

The organization of the Rochester Gas Company in 1848 and the appearance of upwards of 200 gas lamps in the streets during the early fifties was a cause for local pride, but the failure to move with similar dispatch in the case of the water works company chartered in 1852 left the city gravely handicapped. New fire companies were organized and their equipment improved, but these proved of little avail against the fury of the flames which swept down Main Street from Clinton to St. Paul in 1854, consuming several large stores and the Blossom Hotel with an estimated loss of \$155,000. Still the community could not muster the leadership or the will to solve this water problem for another two decades.

The functions of the police likewise increased with urban growth, but here at least the services of paid officers were enlisted—in contrast with the volunteer fire companies—and several institutions were established to assist in the care of the disorderly. A Home for the Friendless, to care for wayward women, had been formed by charitable persons in 1849, the same year that the state opened its Western House of Refuge for juvenile delinquents. While the latter rapidly grew into the most extensive institution in the city, it did not entirely fill the need presented by a wave of truancy in 1853, and accordingly the city provided a House for Idle and Truant Children. The county added still another correctional institution with the opening of the Workhouse and Penitentiary in 1855.

Progress was perhaps relatively easy in these civic fields where the establishment of institutions appeared to represent real accomplishments, but urban problems were becoming increasingly complex in the field of public health. The third cholera visitation in 1852, which carried off approximately 450 victims, not only proved proportionately more severe than the two earlier epidemics but disclosed several new public hazards. The health authorities, who spent over \$8,000 during the emergency, made a conscientious study of living conditions in the areas where most fatalities occurred. As a result several old rookeries and crowded tenements were found to be active centers of the contagion, while two or three newly erected but poorly ventilated dwelling blocks likewise proved undesirable. Open sewers running through the basements of these blocks, and multiple-family necessities, as well as near-by hog pens and open garbage piles appeared as characteristic companions of disease areas. Attention was focused on the "laws of hygiene," renewed efforts to improve the sewer system were called for, renewed demands for a city hospital appeared, and the need for a municipal program for garbage removal was recognized. Finally the board recommended a law to require all persons proposing to erect dwellings "to submit their plans to some competent tribunal for its approval, with special reference to light and ventilation."

Additional sewer expenditures and a makeshift system of garbage collection appeared in the mid-fifties, as well as renewed efforts to exclude back-yard hog pens from the central part of the town. The health authorities were unable to surmount the obstacles blocking their long-projected City Hospital, though the successful establishment of St. Mary's Hospital by the Sisters of Charity in 1857 alleviated this situation. Meanwhile the outbreak of a wave of juvenile delinquency, calling attention to the wretched hovels in which many homeless waifs as well as poor families lived, failed to produce action on the housing front. Even large cities, such as New York and Philadelphia where slum conditions had become serious, were moving with hesitation in the face of this complex problem. In Rochester the authorities focused their attention on an attempt, by the enforcement of a truancy law, to get the children into schools or workshops. While recurring fires helped to remove some of the old wooden rookeries erected in the central area during the boom days of the twenties, the more moderate population growth of the fifties and sixties permitted builders to catch

up with the demand for modest cottages on the outlying streets, but this unregulated development produced in its turn a situation fraught with problems for the future.

Meanwhile, further advance was achieved in the educational field. The charter of 1850, by finally abolishing the old school districts, permitted the board of education to organize senior departments in a few schools, a makeshift arrangement for providing some advanced instruction to able and persevering scholars. The destruction by fire of the old Collegiate Institute in 1851 spurred the campaign for a public high school, and the Rochester Free Academy was finally organized in 1857 in the enlarged Rochester No. 1 school near the courthouse. A few school playgrounds were provided, marking another advance, and in 1863 a selection from the various school libraries was made, forming a collection of some 2,000 volumes for a central school library open to adult use. Nevertheless the city's principal reliance in this field was still upon the library of some 10,000 books maintained by the Athenaeum and Mechanics Association.

## Urban Institutions Emerge

The early sixties not only presented the city fathers with heavy responsibilities growing out of the war emergency but saw the further development of old civic agencies. Revisions in the charter curbed the influence of politics over the public services, placed the increasing staff of municipal employees on a salary basis, and boosted and then finally eliminated the long meaningless tax limit. Nothing came of renewed efforts to purchase either Falls Field or a strip along the east bank of the river south of the aqueduct for a public park. The chartering of a private water company likewise proved unfruitful, but street-car lines were successfully opened, providing transit facilities somewhat commensurate with the community's needs. Indeed, the urban character of Rochester's civic institutions was clearly established in 1867, the end of the first half century of municipal government.

Perhaps the most direct responsibility brought to the city fathers by the Civil War was that of raising the prescribed volunteer and draft quotas. At the first call in April, 1861, the council appropriated funds not only for a recruiting center in the old market building

but for the partial equipment and maintenance of the volunteers until they should be mustered into the army. Agitation for bounties to spur enlistments brought action from both the county and the state in July, 1862, as each sought to head off the need for a draft. Over five thousand men were registered in a city-wide poll that August when a thousand recruits were called for. The county determined to increase its bounty payments, and several city wards offered special bounties, as when the first ward raised \$1,800 by private subscription for this purpose. When a year later the federal draft permitted individuals to buy exemption with a \$300 commutation, the city fathers offered an additional sum of \$300 to each draftee. Doubts as to the legality of this feature and a refusal by the bankers to lend the necessary money blocked the council's effort to put the poor man on an equal basis with his well-to-do neighbor. However, enlistments in Rochester, whether stimulated by patriotism or bounties, were sufficiently numerous to reduce to a minimum the number of local draftees enrolled through the crude Civil War lottery.

A considerable expansion in the city's welfare burden, representing an acceleration of an earlier trend, resulted from the increased number of widows and orphans. Despite a shift from indoor to outdoor relief in 1857, the outlays increased irregularly from \$12,500 to \$53,300 during the next ten years. The poor store and the city wood yard, both established in 1857 to sell at cost, became increasingly popular among the destitute families of war casualties. After repeated delays the City (General) Hospital was finally completed in 1864 in time to share with St. Mary's the care of the last shipments of wounded soldiers sent to Rochester. Meanwhile the increase in the number of orphans stimulated the opening of St. Mary's boys' home in 1864, the same year that the city took over the maintenance of the county's Truant House, while a Jewish orphan asylum was opened three years later. A portion of the poor fund was granted for the care of sick public charges in these institutions, in lieu of their maintenance in the county poorhouse, and the city thus expanded its welfare agencies with the aid of private charity.

Expenditures for public health were kept under \$5,000 a year, partly as a result of the absence of severe epidemics. Sanitary conditions improved with the construction of a dumping platform below the main falls where the licensed scavengers could empty and clean

their carts without creating a nuisance. A closely related drive to round up stray hogs and cattle found foraging in the streets met a favorable response in the mid-sixties. Sewer improvements included the construction of new outlets below the main falls, thus correcting the former pollution of the mill races and dams in the center of the city. The introduction of the new glazed tile pipe in place of the old stone sewers marked a real step forward, as did the increase in sewer mileage from 21 to 36 between 1861 and 1868. Unfortunately, though the new sewers were now mapped, no plan determined their route, and another decade passed before Rochester gathered the data necessary to prepare a relief map fundamental to any real sewer system. Dependence on rain water and an occasional flushing from the canal proved another drawback not corrected until the mid-seventies when a public water system was finally provided.

The scant water supply continued as in the past to represent the most serious handicap of the fire fighters. Steadily mounting fire losses goaded the city to action, and in 1861 the first two steam engines were purchased. When the efforts of the husky volunteers to drag their heavy engines to the scene of a fire occasioned delays, horses were rented and later added to the regular equipment. But the new engines created so much resentment among the remaining old-style companies that two additional steamers with horses to match had soon to be purchased, whereupon the thirteen volunteer companies gave place to five paid companies — the fifth to operate the hook and ladder cart. Fire losses were cut down for a time, but the construction of several new underground reservoirs failed to meet the needs of such an emergency as occurred in 1867, when the Palmer Block was consumed at a loss of \$80,000 and the lives of three firemen.

The fifty-odd firemen swelled the number of paid municipal employees to well over two hundred. The city treasurer at \$3,500 received the largest salary in 1867, but the mayor's honorarium was now \$1,500, and a dozen other officials received salaries in excess of the \$1,000 paid to the principals of the ten largest public schools. One hundred-odd teachers, most of them young women, received but \$300 to \$400 a year. The forty-odd policemen, next to the firemen and schoolteachers in number, received \$75 a month, but provided their own blue uniforms and policeman's hats—standard equipment

in Rochester after 1861 when police uniforms were first introduced from New York City:

After a discouraging series of delays the work of rebuilding Main Street bridge was finally completed in 1857, ending a long period when the commercial activity in the center of Rochester was seriously obstructed. The repaving of a dozen principal streets provided a further boon to local trade, while the number of street lights was increased severalfold until more than one thousand were scattered about the community. The city paid the cost of bells to be installed in several churches to serve as fire alarms in the parts of the city not within easy reach of the big courthouse bell's warning.

But of all the new improvements, the most striking was the streetcar service provided in the years following 1863. The number of hack drivers had steadily increased for more than a decade, numbering 96 by 1863, and the possibility that outside capitalists might acquire a state franchise to build street railways in Rochester prompted a group of local men to secure that privilege themselves. Two lines were built in 1863, one eastward from the Four Corners over the bridge and south to Mt. Hope cemetery, and the other north from the Four Corners to Deep Hollow. But the horse-drawn cars attracted insufficient patronage to pay the company's running expenses, forcing an early foreclosure. A reorganized company took up the difficult task of keeping the line open through snow-blocked streets in the winter and during lazy summer days when a leisurely half hour's jaunt appeared preferable to paying the 8¢ fares charged in 1868. Nevertheless, a third line was soon built out Buffalo Street, and others were shortly to follow as Rochester embarked on a new era of expansion during the seventies.

The close of the Civil War thus found Rochester variously equipped to perform the complex civic functions of an urban community. With its city offices housed in a new courthouse; with a half-dozen fire houses, sixteen school buildings, several of them of brick and containing three or more rooms, and one equipped as a high school; with a county jail, almshouse, and penitentiary, a state House of Correction, two hospitals, four orphan asylums, and a Home for the Friendless; with a public market, hay scale, and the weighlock provided by the state to measure the commerce passing in the canal; with a customs

office and lighthouse at the mouth of the river; with a public cemetery, six small squares, and the open country reaching within a mile of the Four Corners on all sides; with an extensive network of streets, some of them improved, bordered by sidewalks, and lit by seven hundred gas lights and half as many more burning kerosene; with a score of public or private wells, a confusing pattern of sewers, and an irregular but active system of garbage collection; with a paid personnel for day and night police duty, four steamers manned by paid fire fighters, and one hundred other elected or appointed officials; with a population of 60,000 scattered over 5,136 acres, eight times the area of the original village, Rochester, despite many civic shortcomings, had made giant strides during the half century that had elapsed since the grant of the first village charter in 1817.

### Editor's Note

A later issue of *Rochester History* will be devoted to the second half century of the city's municipal development. Meanwhile, students wishing to press this topic further may be interested in examining W. Earl Weller's articles on the development of the Rochester charter in the Rochester Historical Society *Publications* VIII and XII; Isaac Adler's account of the City Manager Movement in the Society's volume XVII; Edwin A. Fisher's history of Public Works in Rochester in the Society's volume XII; and Frederick C. Mosher's *City Manager Government in Rochester*.

As the foregoing article has been based on a detailed study of all the sources available, no adequate bibliography can be appended here. The author's forthcoming volume on *Rochester: the Water Power City: 1812-1854* will, however, show many of the sources, but it should be noted here that much assistance was secured from the articles of Mr. Weller mentioned above and from an extensive history, still in manuscript, of "The Government and Finances of Rochester," by Professor Donald W. Gilbert of the University of Rochester. A convenient survey of comparative developments in other cities, both in Europe and America, is provided by John A. Fairlie, *Municipal Administration* (New York, 1910).