

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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

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Vol. VIII

July, 1946

No. 3

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## Rochester Learns to Play: 1850-1900

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

One of the outstanding features of the American scene during the second half of the nineteenth century was the rise of sports and other forms of popular entertainment. Rochester's share in this development was fairly typical, since many communities experienced an early enthusiasm in the late fifties for organized games, saw some of these activities curtailed during the Civil War, struggled to revive and maintain winning teams and to provide larger facilities for entertainment in the early postwar years, and slowly learned the lessons essential to the development of true sportsmanship. A movement which appeared at first as an idle but agreeable outlet for surplus energies developed as it progressed quite profound consequences for the spirit of the people. The city awoke finally in the late eighties to the need for public parks to accommodate the fuller life of its citizens.

### Early Forms of Recreation

Rochesterians, like Americans generally a century ago, were earnest if not sober folk, preoccupied with the perplexing task of keeping body and soul together. That latter phrase was not yet a hackneyed expression, for the material needs of the body and the salvation of individual souls were both considered important, some emphasizing the one, some the other. Whichever was favored was nurtured with zeal and devotion. Among respectable folk it was more usual to find a man pursuing wealth and religion with equal ardor than to see a person relaxed and forgetful of both. It required a special occasion, such as the nation's birthday or some other holiday, to justify a fishing excursion on Irondequoit Bay.

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ROCHESTER HISTORY, published quarterly by the Rochester Public Library, distributed free at the Library, by mail 25 cents per year. Address correspondence to the City Historian, Rochester Public Library, 115 South Avenue, Rochester 4, N.Y.

Yet these earnest Rochesterians of the city's formative years require no pity from the twentieth century. Their domestic, worldly, and cultural affairs were usually crowded with fresh incidents, and if they sought added excitement it could readily be found in the rapidly changing community about them. Knowledge was highly regarded, and prominent among the educational agencies of the day were the museum and the traveling circuses. A half-dozen of the latter annually pitched their tents on Falls Field during the 1840's, affording a most agreeable method of learning the wonders of animal life. Church festivals to raise funds for a new organ, a business trip or a friendly visit to one's relatives, a rest at a health resort equipped with a mineral spring—all these were accepted forms of diversion. Few but the shiftless or profligate ventured to engage in a game of billiards or nine pins, or to patronize the theater, though musical entertainments were regarded as uplifting, and the elaborate ritual of secret societies was developing a strong hold even in the community which had once been the center of anti-Masonic furor.

A growing youngster could have asked no grander playground than the Rochester of 1850. The Erie Canal with its bustling traffic then at a high peak, the rumbling mills full of crude but fascinating machinery, the river dashing over impressive cascades into a deep gorge still in its wild inviting state, a population of domestic animals exceeding that of man—kept the city youth of a century ago more than entertained. Unfortunately he was expected, all too soon, to throw his supple shoulder behind the wheel of progress and assume a man's responsibilities—in short to put away such childish things as idle pranks and useless play.

The city was likewise growing up. Kite flying, bathing in the river, the canal, or raceways, ball throwing in the streets were alike banned by the aldermen who hoped thereby to check the mounting toll of accidents and runaways. Other opportunities for simple domestic amusement were disappearing from the increasingly congested city at the very time that new standards of sociability were being introduced from abroad. Germans, lonely in a strange land, sought the conviviality of beer gardens and resented the efforts of straight-laced Yankees to close them on the Sabbath. The Irish, who satisfied their religious needs at early Mass, required more than a visit to the cemetery to fill the rest of their free day. Indeed, Rochester with barely 45% of its adults in 1850 able to claim a local residence of five years, was largely comprised of uprooted

folk, many of them landless but not benighted, who sought new outlets for self-expression.

Perhaps the renewed effort to apply Yankee restraints in the early 1850's helped to accelerate the development of outdoor sports—a movement in which many other factors played a part. The effort to close saloons and beer gardens encouraged the establishment of picnic groves beyond the city limits. Martin McIntyre opened a fisherman's lodge or "pier saloon" overlooking the beach at Charlotte before the close of 1854, and Newport House was built on the west side of Irondequoit Bay a year or so later. Old ordinances against bathing within the city limits were indifferently enforced against youngsters, but protests regularly greeted the occasional "overgrown ruffians" who ventured into the river or canal in search of relief on a hot day.

Mixed adult bathing did not appear in the Rochester area until the fifties. The first record is that of 1853, when a correspondent of the *Democrat* observed over 100 men and women in the water near Charlotte during the "melting season." Two years later McIntyre announced the provision of dressing tents on the beach. "Bathing dresses" to accommodate either gentlemen or ladies were soon advertised by McIntyre and by James Sherry who provided dressing booths in his home overlooking the beach some distance east of the river. It was noted that parties could go down on the steam cars in the morning and return by the late afternoon train. Seventy-five city school teachers made such an excursion in July, 1856, enjoying a walk along the beach and a sailboat ride, but the account of the outing failed to mention any bathers. Indeed, fishing, boating, and picnicking remained the chief attractions at these local resorts for another ten years or so, if the very occasional references to bathing may be trusted.

The Rochester Union Course was laid out north of the city in 1849. Purses ranging from \$100 to \$500 attracted small crowds to occasional racing events, but the suspicion that a group of professional gamblers controlled the races injured the management's reputation and checked the growth of the sport.

A sportsmen's association, likewise organized in 1849, was chiefly interested in hunting and angling. The club made an excursion in 1858 to the Thousand Islands, a resort center already gaining popularity among residents who could afford a brief visit at one of its pioneer summer hotels. Other favored citizens were learning the delights of a week

or so at Saratoga or at one of the new seaside resorts, but a summer vacation was still a rare treat. A party of eight professional men, all but one from Rochester, took a fifteen-day camping trip through the Adirondacks in 1860. Their "Life in the Wilderness" proved so novel that extended reports were printed in three newspapers, that of Charles A. Dewey in the *New York Commercial Advertiser* running to fifteen articles. A Rochester party returned annually during the early sixties.

The increased popularity of outdoor amusements in warm months was matched during the winter by new enthusiasm for skating and sleighing. East Avenue quickly filled with dashing sleighs after each favorable snow-fall. Boys, who had learned to skate on frozen pools in the canal or on the river above the dam, continued, as they grew up, to frequent these natural rinks; by the late fifties skating had become an accepted sport for adults. When a few bold young women ventured onto the ice in January, 1860, one editor commented approvingly that "Ladies should more generally indulge in this exhilarating and becoming exercise. The practice is no encroachment upon modesty or propriety." The organization of the Rochester Skating Club before the end of that month assured cooperation in the necessary task of clearing the ice of snow.

The appearance of organized games was, however, the unique feature of this period. Two cricket clubs, formed in 1847 by residents who hailed from England, inaugurated the movement in Rochester. Unfortunately their pioneer contests with rival teams from Syracuse and Buffalo resulted in a series of defeats in 1851 and again in 1853, while the more successful season the next year attracted little enthusiasm. Occasional games were played in succeeding years, but when an All England team arrived in 1859 the result was so humiliating for Rochester that further efforts to establish cricket locally were abandoned. Perhaps, however, the more important cause for the decline of the English game was the new and overwhelming popularity of baseball.

The rise of baseball was a sudden phenomenon which swept throughout the northern states in the late fifties. Boys had been throwing and batting balls on streets and neighborhood lots, to the annoyance of residents in Rochester as elsewhere, for many years. A boys' game, inherited from colonial times, had passed through varied modifications, finally emerging as a sport for young men around the mid-century. The game spread gradually from the New York area until, in 1857, a number of cities formed clubs.

Suddenly the next spring baseball came to Rochester with a vengeance. The organization of the Flour City, Live Oak, and University clubs occurred in quick succession early in May, 1858. Franklin Square became a favorite mecca on warm afternoons and evenings that summer as these and other teams vied for its use. One of the first match games was that of August 5, in which the Live Oaks defeated the Flour City nine, 24 to 13, before a crowd estimated at 2,500 on a corner of the new university campus. The Live Oaks, clad in blue flannel Marie Louise shirts, decorated with a sprig of oak leaves on the left breast, and wearing white flannel pants and caps, likewise trimmed with blue, easily captured the city's favor.

The development of inter-club rivalries and inter-city contests introduced a new measure of loyalties. When the Flour City team met and lost the first match game with Buffalo, represented by the Niagara Club, Rochester fans professed confidence that the city's favorite club, the Live Oaks, would quickly redress the score. Unfortunately, the boastful claims expressed in behalf of the several clubs made it increasingly difficult to bring the leading rivals together. The Live Oaks did meet the Eries, a second Buffalo team, in 1859, losing the first but winning the second game. A third game, scheduled at neutral Le Roy, was claimed by the Eries when a rainy day kept the Rochester players at home. Another Rochester team, the Lone Stars, defeated the Niagaras of Buffalo in a match game on Jones Square in 1860, but no record of the final outcome of the three-game series has been preserved.

Despite disharmony between the leading clubs, an active schedule of practice and match games continued through 1859 and 1860. In addition to Franklin Square and the university field, a diamond was laid out on the Babbitt tract in the third ward, and another on the river flats on the east side below the breweries. The total number of ball clubs within the city increased to eight, and a number of valley teams appeared. The national tour of the Excelsior Club of Brooklyn in 1860 presented Rochester with two humiliating defeats. The Flour City nine gained one run against 21, and the Live Oaks 9 against 27. One editor blamed these defeats on the greater experience of the Brooklyn team, organized four years before; another reporter uncovered the fact that the Excelsior pitcher received \$500 a year and could make ball playing his profession; still another commentator warned that Rochester should not feel it necessary to win all the time. Many years would be required before players and

fans, locally as in other cities, would master this test of sportsmanship.

The enthusiasm for baseball stimulated a move to organize boat clubs as well. The local press, catching the spirit, dispatched reporters to cover all sporting activities. The appearance of a crew boat on the river above the dam was noted with pleasure in July, 1858, and soon the organization of the Resolute Regatta Club was announced. When the Resolute boat, 36 feet in length and equipped with six oars, was ready for delivery, the proud owners exhibited it for a day in front of the Court House. Within a month, six racing boats had been launched, two of them scull boats, and a Sylvie Club was seeking a match with the Resolutes. The first "moonlight excursion" of the Genesee fleet up the river, to the accompaniment of a small band of musicians, suggested a more elaborate review a few days later in which 15 boats participated. The oarsmen were out early the next spring, and nine rowing clubs made ready to take part in a regatta directed by "Commodore" Roswell Hart in October, 1859. The first racing yacht appeared on the bay that year, stimulating talk of a contest with other lake craft. The rowing clubs did invite outside competition for a race on the Genesee above the dam for the Fourth in 1860, on which occasion the "As You Like It," representative of the Shakespeare Boat Club of Toronto, carried off the prize.

Three significant aspects of this recreational activity began to emerge before the Civil War. On the one hand the players acquired a new conception of physical fitness, a new appreciation for leisure, discovered the merits of teamwork, and began to re-evaluate life's objectives. Although the number who shared in the new forms of physical exercise was limited, crowds of spectators were attracted out to sunny fields where they felt the challenge of new loyalties, enjoyed new uses for leisure and new escapes from personal frustrations. As the proportion of onlookers to players increased, the third aspect of the development, the commercialization of these popular amusements, commenced.

The full import of these trends was barely suggested during the fifties. The gymnastic activities of the German Turn Verein dated from 1851, but other activities predominated. Professor William P. Shadders appealed to the new interest in physical training for support at his gymnasium, the first in Rochester, opened in 1854. The number of young lawyers, clergymen, clerks and bookkeepers who joined his exercise classes prompted a removal to larger quarters four years later, and

a class for young women was announced in 1860. The press generously praised the physical benefits derived from these new activities, displaying a solicitude for the "weaker sex" by recommending archery and hiking for summer pastimes and skating in winter; the press was equally diligent in urging increased attendance of fans and frequently called for more generous material support.

The large crowds attracted by several of the sport events, particularly the boat races, most of them free of charge, presented a serious challenge to commercial entertainers. Although only two circuses visited Rochester in 1858, the smallest number in many years, the response was so discouraging that none appeared the next year. The proprietor of Falls Field, deprived of his accustomed patronage, sought a new means to popularize his beer garden and finally found it in Anloise De Lave, the tight-rope artist, who came to demonstrate his skill on a wire stretched across the gorge at the upper falls. The contemporary performance of De Lave's rival, M. Blondin, at Niagara Falls, added zest to the occasion. Falls Field was crowded to capacity on August 16 as a throng, estimate at 18,000, gathered to witness the bold feat. Repeat performances, with hazardous variations, kept the city amused for the next two weeks, but after one spectator was killed by a fall into the gorge and several lads were injured testing their skill in scattered back yards the authorities required De Lave to get a license. Shortly after a last stunt, in which his attempt to carry a man across the gorge ended in near disaster, De Lave departed. Ten days later a balloon ascension from Falls Field proved much less successful as a commercial feature, since thrifty citizens could watch it aloft from any part of town.

Thrifty citizens, who did not patronize the grand stand at the Union Course and who dodged past the ticket man at the occasional ball games with visiting teams, presented a difficult problem to the backers of these activities. Games in which the players could be multiplied indefinitely could rely for maintenance on the participants. Thus a new "bowling palace" was opened on Front Street in 1859, equipped with six alleys and described as the largest and most expensive bowling hall outside New York city. A billiard match between Rochester and Syracuse champions had attracted attention the year before, and new star matches were arranged in order to popularize that old pastime. The rowing clubs likewise maintained their own boats, but the ball teams needed an improved diamond, while visiting clubs demanded a guarantee of their

expenses. Only Falls Field was as yet fenced in, an improvement made necessary by the ease with which a lad could crawl under the side of a tent, but that field was too uneven for baseball. Hope that spectator support would soon be available was bolstered by the new encouragement given indoor entertainers.

Valiant efforts to maintain a theater had been made in Rochester, and with some success in earlier years, yet Dr. Shaw of Brick Church was able to boast in 1855 that the city required but a few months to starve out such ventures. Musical entertainments and the other cultural offerings that centered in Corinthian Hall were more favored, though perhaps the explanation lay partly in the fact that a theatrical company required a larger budget than individual lecturers and musical artists. In any event, a new dramatic era dawned in 1859 when Wellington Meech assumed control of the Metropolitan Theater. The growing strength of German, Irish, and Jewish groups may have influenced the shift in opinion towards the theater, but Meech's program was well designed to attract a popular response. He opened in June with the first "female minstrels" heard in Rochester, antecedents of the burlesque performers of a later day. A "world renowned European magician" followed, and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," in which eleven-year-old Cordelia Howard made a notable hit as little Eva, enjoyed three separate runs of several days each. Blondin, the tight-rope expert who had crossed the Niagara that summer, filled the house for several nights in November. The remarkable success of the popular program of the Metropolitan prompted the manager of Corinthian Hall to stage a "pugilistic encounter"—the first regular boxing match witnessed in Rochester. Both establishments operated as theaters in 1860, catering to the growing taste for popular entertainment which paralleled the increased interest in outdoor sports.

The Civil War influenced various aspects of the new social movement in different ways. Many of the young men in the ball teams and boat clubs were among the first to respond to Lincoln's call for troops. Occasional games between the remnants of earlier clubs or with visiting teams failed to divert public interest from the more serious contest. But the lack of zest, which crippled the rowing clubs and organized games, contrasted sharply with the increased popularity of lake and river bathing in 1863. The need for relaxation not only sent parties of picnickers to Charlotte, Newport House, and the newly erected Sea Breeze House



near the outlet of Irondequoit Bay during the summer months, but likewise attracted paying crowds to the commercial rinks first opened in these winters. A boy's game known as "shinny" annoyed some elders, among whom an increasing number of "lady skaters" were noted. Dashing sleighs now appeared on Lake Avenue as well as East. Indeed, wartime winters, with many soldiers home on furlough or safe in winter quarters, proved more conducive to social frolic than the warm months when battle bulletins overshadowed the community. Even the celebration of the Fourth became sober and restrained, especially in 1862 and 1863 when news from the South was most foreboding.

Many social functions were suspended or given a military atmosphere during the first war years. The Knights Templar staged military maneuvers and the Sportsmen's Club held shooting matches. Commercial entertainers, on the other hand, answering the deep-felt need for escape from the war's tragedy, continued to thrive. The newly opened Washington Hall presented an indoor sensation in 1863—Rochester's first stereopticon lecture series. The reassuring victory at Gettysburg that summer encouraged a revival of earlier pastimes. The warm response which now greeted the celebrations of various nationality groups indicated the community's increased solidarity, product of the common wartime experience.

## Post War Enthusiasms

The news of Lee's surrender in the spring of 1865 prompted a letter, signed "Athletic," urging Rochester to prepare for a revival of the manly game of baseball. Vigorous activity soon appeared in this field, although early successes made later defeats hard to bear. Sudden enthusiasm for numerous pastimes characterized the first peacetime decade, but in several instances a new excitement hastened the eclipse of its predecessor. Perhaps the zealous devotion to new fads indicated a survival of the old spirit of earnestness, permeating the new playtime activities. Few of these amusements attracted the financial support necessary to maintain high levels of performance until the late seventies, but Rochesterians were certainly having a good time in these rollicking years.

Baseball, the first sport to revive, enjoyed a brief period of high favor before suffering a long decline. The game was still in its formative stage, and not the players alone but fans as well had much to learn about sportsmanship. The important issue of amateur *vs* professional

baseball was being decided in favor of the latter in many cities, and before Rochester could take part in this new movement sound financial backing was required.

The returning soldiers, eager to continue a game popular at the army camps, joined in the spontaneous formation of a number of teams in the summer of 1865. Soon Rochester had a Pacific Club on the west side, an Atlantic Club east of the river, an Excelsior Club and a Mutual Club, each eager to represent the city in contests with the Niagaras of Buffalo and the Artics of Syracuse. A half-dozen junior clubs were equally active, competing for the use of Jones Square and other available fields. The Excelsiors, the Mutuels and the Pacifics, emerging as the leading clubs by the close of the season, had their pick of younger players the next spring. All three played an active schedule that second summer and accepted invitations to a tournament at Auburn in the fall. The Excelsiors and the Pacifics advanced successfully to the semi-finals where they triumphed respectively over the Niagaras and the Artics. Unfortunately the Excelsiors, Rochester's strongest team, defeated the Niagaras by a narrow margin, and when the judges announced that the second prize would go to the team making the best score against the champions, the hope of Rochester fans to win both the gold and the silver baseballs faded. Protesting the ruling, the Rochester teams refused to play off the final game. The city hardly knew how to receive its returning heroes, each team bearing a large golden pumpkin in place of the official award, but the comments from neighboring cities were not ambiguous.

The Excelsiors defeated the Pacifics the next July and represented the city when outside teams came to town. Many of the strong clubs then touring the country avoided Rochester, for the lack of an inclosed field and the inability of the ticket sellers to collect more than \$100 from the milling spectators had given the city a bad name. When the Excelsiors made an eastern tour themselves in September, three defeats in four games sent them home chastened. A new Central City Club of Syracuse, pooling the talent of all the teams of that city, came to Rochester in October to present the Excelsiors with another defeat, a setback which local fans readily forgave when the Excelsiors won two games from the Niagaras of Buffalo.

Rochester was greatly surprised the next June when a new team of younger men, the Alerts, upset the Excelsiors. Fans scarcely knew which club to favor that season as neither proved strong against visiting teams.

One fact became clear, that much competitive strength would be gained if all the best players could be gathered into one club, as had been done at Syracuse, but jealousies forestalled such action. The decision of the Excelsiors not to form a team in 1869 left the field to the Alerts. Unfortunately that club, lacking stiff practice at home, was poorly prepared for its occasional games with strong teams from abroad. The Red Stockings of Cincinnati, the White Stockings of Chicago, the Forest City Club from Cleveland, and, most humiliating of all, the Niagaras of Buffalo, each compelled the Alerts to bow in turn. A new name was required the next year, not to mention some new players and many other matters. The Flower City Club was the result, but its record proved no more gratifying to local fans than those of its immediate predecessors.

Several important developments were transforming the amateur pastime of the late fifties into a professional sport. The keen rivalry between cities had rallied the support of merchants, some of whom offered skilled players attractive clerkships and permitted them to spend their afternoons on the ball fields. By 1870 a number of teams had frankly gone professional, and the advantages they enjoyed in steady practice and a wider selection of players were clearly evident in the defeats suffered by the Flower City nine that year. The leading clubs had likewise adopted a new ball, described as a "dead ball" in contrast with that formerly in use. Scores were suddenly reduced, and amateurs who did not play frequently enough to develop protective callouses were at a disadvantage, for gloves had not yet come into use.

Although a junior club, known as the Rochesters, represented the city in contests with valley towns during the early seventies and won second place in a tournament held in Jefferson County in 1873, sportsmen were reluctant to accept it as the city team. Baseball games seemed to be in progress on every open plot about Rochester, especially on Sunday afternoons, if the number of protests is a fair criterion. Neighborhood clubs and impromptu teams abounded, providing amusement at picnics and on other occasions, but no representative team emerged. An effort to form a stock company to lease a ballpark and engage a professional nine came to naught in July, 1871, and soon a number of the abler players of the earlier teams scattered to other cities in response to attractive offers from professional clubs.

The enthusiasm for baseball in the first postwar years overshadowed other summer sports, though several outdoor amusements,

especially those at the local "watering places" continued to thrive. Rowing clubs came back into favor with the decline of baseball around 1870, and a succession of fads, notably that for velocipedes, enjoyed a brief popularity. Efforts to maintain a race course, hampered by dishonest gamblers during most of the decade, finally resulted in the establishment of the new Driving Park Association in the mid-seventies when practical business men awoke to the sound commercial opportunities in popular amusements.

While the popularity of several of the postwar pastimes fluctuated sharply, the new enthusiasm surrounding the successive celebrations of the Fourth was enduring. Official committees arranged parades and other ceremonies, and the activities of varied organizations surpassed all precedents. A public fireworks display on the river above the dam attracted a crowd of 20,000 in 1865, closing a day full of democratic pageantry. The Summernight Festival of the Maennerchor at Bartholomay's Park the next evening was hailed as an outstanding success. The city itself practiced economy during the next few years, but privately sponsored amusements abounded, attracting a boatload of Canadians across the lake in 1866 to witness Rochester's celebration of Independence Day. George J. Whitney's annual display of fireworks at his State Street mansion and the picnics of the Workingmen's Association at Maple Grove proved outstanding year after year. The official celebration of Memorial Day commenced in 1868, and two years later the preparations for the procession to Mt. Hope had become so elaborate that the city was persuaded to sprinkle the highway leading to the cemetery where President Anderson of the university addressed a throng estimated at 15,000.

Charlotte, Newport House, and Sea Breeze House regularly offered special attractions on the Fourth and enjoyed a steadily growing popularity throughout the summer months. A small steamer ran excursions from the upper landing near Maple Grove to Charlotte and around into the bay to Newport House and return each Sunday until 1868, when a bridge over the Irondequoit outlet blocked the route. Other steamers announced varied lake excursions, including "moonlight festivals" with the accompaniment of the Flower City Harmonists, inaugurated in August, 1866. A club of amateur pedestrians, formed that year, made its first annual hike to Charlotte, returning by train after a sumptuous fish dinner at McIntyre's.

The movement for summer camps along the lake and the bay started in the late sixties. Dr. Edward Mott Moore was among the first to take his family to the lake for the summer. By 1872 all the lots along the beach for a half-mile west of McIntyre's place were occupied by cottages or tents, and a new development east of the river, to be known as Summerville, was projected that fall. The Birds and Worms, a social club formed in the late sixties, erected a cabin on Irondequoit Bay in 1872, and soon three other clubs and a few private cottages were similarly situated.

Facilities for the entertainment of excursionists had to be expanded. A reporter found the 100 boats for hire at Newport House all in use on June 19, 1873, and noted that many parties were driving on to Sea Breeze House where improved accommodations had been announced. Glen House, erected at the upper Genesee landing on the west side in 1870, was provided with a long flight of stairs leading up to Maple Park, the new amusement center opened that year at the northern terminus of the city car line. Developments at Charlotte centered around the Spencer House built in 1873 by John Burns on the site of McIntyre's old fish house. The Spencer House advertised 76 sleeping rooms, numerous parlors, dressing rooms, and dining facilities, as well as a barn to accommodate 100 horses. The construction the next year of the Cottage and four smaller hotels made Charlotte the leading resort on the lake. Special holiday trains on the steam railroad shared the burden of excursionists with the "Falling Waters" and other small steamboats which scheduled frequent trips down the river from Glen House.

The more distant resorts known in earlier years continued to attract favored residents, and a new vacation area was developing to the South. The pioneer summer camps were established on Hemlock Lake in the late sixties. Watkins Glen and the upper Genesee Gorge near Portage received attention for the first time in these years, while a few bold hunters ventured north into the wilds of Canada.

Winter amusements enjoyed a similar popularity. Four skating rinks were opened in the first peacetime winter, one of them by H. H. Edgerton who advertised heated shelters. Masquerades and skatorial artists provided attractions. Washington Street rink was rebuilt in 1868 and opened the next January as the Rochester rink, an inclosed structure able to accommodate hundreds of spectators as well as skaters. The performances of two figure skating stars, Miss Elwood and Miss Dean,

attracted huge crowds, rivaled only by the racing contests at Edgerton's Exchange Street rink. Sleighing retained its charms, with East and Lake Avenues vying for favor. Jolly parties, snugly packed in great sleds, visited Charlotte and the bay where the improved facilities now accommodated diners in winter as well as summer.

A rage for velocipedes captured sports enthusiasts in 1869. The arrival of a salesman in February spurred the opening of a school for velocipedists in the arsenal, and when the ice melted at the Rochester rink that structure was leased for exhibits and races with the new running machine. A demonstrator established a speed record by a trip from the Four Corners to Charlotte in one hour and twenty-five minutes. Several young men tried to equal that record and win a free velocipede, but none quite made it, and the new toy practically disappeared by the end of the year.

Falls Field continued its traditional functions. A succession of circuses, each advertised as larger and more astonishing than its predecessors (and some actually redeeming the boast), visited that field annually. P. T. Barnum shattered precedent by bringing his "Greatest Show on Earth" to Rochester by train in June, 1873. Balloon ascensions acquired a scientific as well as a popular interest when "Professors" Love and King prepared to record the mysteries of the heavens. An extended flight from Rochester to Cazenovia late in 1869, one of the longest yet made in America, attracted much comment, but no description of the trip was quite so exciting as that of the *Democrat* reporter who missed his passage at the last moment and published a realistic but imaginary account of the voyage before the correct version reached the city. People loved a clever hoax, as their continued interest in the Cardiff giant, "discovered" near Syracuse that year, demonstrated. The persistent favor enjoyed by Keno halls and other gambling rooms, despite the efforts of the police to enforce the laws against them, further illustrated this aspect of the thirst for amusement. The police were likewise called upon occasionally to halt a "maim of cocks" between Buffalo or Syracuse and Rochester, in one of which the local birds won a bloody contest, 8 to 1.

The betting instinct, which nurtured some of these illegal games, greatly embarrassed the efforts of those who sought to maintain a race track. The Rochester Union Course was leased in 1865 by a Gentlemen's Driving Association and used primarily for the pleasure of its members

for a number of years. A short racing season in 1867, featuring a match between Palmer and Patches for a stake of \$1,000, attracted sufficient support from the public to prompt Cornelius Johnson, the former lessee, to acquire control again a year later. The Gentlemen's Driving Association transferred its interest to a new track which was laid out on the John Culver farm near the Union Tavern on East Avenue, and when that tract was subdivided by Jane Vick a year or so later, the association moved again, this time to the county fair grounds. Meanwhile, Johnson's success in persuading the officials of the trotting circuit to include Rochester in their schedule held the patronage of professional racers to the Union Course.

Johnson's most popular season was that of 1870. Local racing fans had increased in number and hundreds of gamblers arrived in July for the four-day races in which Lady Thorn, George Palmer, and a dozen other leading horses took part. A riot occurred when one jockey appeared to check his mount at a critical moment, giving the prize to a less favored rival. The corrosive influence of professional gamblers was much too evident for local comfort, and the failure of star horses to appear as advertised the next year injured the management's reputation. Crowds were especially disappointing in 1872 when only 300 spectators came to witness the last day's races. It was the last day at the old race course, for Johnson's lease expired and no one succeeded him.

Although Rochester dropped out of the trotting circuit in 1873, the efforts of a group of prominent business men to establish a Driving Park Association promised to rehabilitate the sport. George J. Whitney assumed the lead with enthusiasm. Five different sites were favored by various members, but when the Holmes tract west of Lake Avenue at the northern extremity of the horse car line was selected, many supporters from other sections of the city withdrew. Whitney and his remaining associates pressed forward, nevertheless, erecting a grandstand capable of seating 6,000 and a sufficient number of horse sheds and other structures to be ready for the four-day racing season in August, 1874. Crowds of 15,000 gathered to witness the inaugural races at which premiums of \$40,000, the largest in the city's history, were distributed.

The revival of the boat clubs in 1869, following the decline of baseball, supplied healthy exercise as well as popular spectacles. A Genesee Boating Association coordinated the efforts of ten clubs and,

with Edgerton as Commodore, staged a parade of fifteen boats on the Fourth in 1870. The clubs on the upper river practiced regularly above the dam every Tuesday evening for several seasons. The "D. W. Powers" of the Riverside Club won the laurels in 1870, only to be displaced in popular favor during subsequent years by boats of the Genesee and the Excelsior Clubs. The growing importance of clubs on the lower Genesee, particularly the Ontario Club of Charlotte, transferred some of these events to that locality. The formation of the Genesee Yacht Club in 1874 provided the incentive for a regatta in September in which the "Seth Green," with the famed fisherman at the helm, out sailed five other yachts in a triangular race on the lake, while the Ontarios defeated the Genesee and Riverside boats on the river.

The quest for amusement in the first post-war decade nurtured a number of social customs. Dancing and theater going were now tolerantly regarded and widely practiced. Club life was taking hold among the men, with the various sports' clubs predominating. Some of these met occasionally through the winter, and at least three exclusively social clubs opened rooms, while other societies held dances and enjoyed various group activities. The state or national conventions of the Odd Fellows, the German Catholic Union, the Turnbund, the Knights Templar, the Irish Catholic Union and the Grand Army of the Republic, brought parades and ceremonies to enliven the Rochester scene.

A spirit of gay sociability was becoming evident by the mid-seventies, despite the hard times. The croquet sets which had first appeared in 1866 could now be seen on many yards, where jolly groups of players added a festive note to residential areas. Italian organ grinders guarded the entrance to Reynolds Arcade or serenaded guests at the principal hotels, but the action of two young blades who engaged one of these musicians to sit with their cab driver and provide a musical accompaniment for their drive about town marked a new departure. A most significant and general expression of the new light-heartedness appeared on warm Saturday evenings in the mid-seventies when a concourse of smartly dressed lasses and swains, interspersed with the heavier figures of their elders, promenaded up and down both sides of Main Street from State to the Liberty Pole. This democratic pageant contributed an agreeable last touch to the events of the week and heralded the opening of a new social era in the city.



## Playing the Game

The secure establishment during the last quarter of the nineteenth century of most of the earlier forms of amusement and the introduction of several new sports made for a wider distribution of recreation and encouraged a move for increased leisure. As the trends started in the 1850's were thus brought to fruition, many of their cultural implications were becoming evident to young and old alike. When the long agitation for public parks began to achieve success in the late eighties a democratic basis for healthy outdoor recreation was assured.

Baseball, already accepted as the national sport in 1875, faced a critical struggle in Rochester. The search for sound financial support encountered frequent set-backs, while dramatic incidents marked the effort to master the lessons of sportsmanship. Much was achieved by the mid-eighties, but success in baseball, as in any sport, is an annual (if not a daily) concern, and another decade slipped by before the city finally learned that sportsmen—players and fans alike—must constantly be on their toes, keen to win, but so full of spirit that defeats can be taken in stride.

After a period of discouragement, during which Rochester failed to develop a representative team, an effort to form a professional club in 1875 achieved some results. A diamond was laid out that year in the newly fenced Driving Park, accommodating games with the champion White Stockings of Chicago among other leading teams, and, while the Rochesters lost most of the big games, a sufficient number of victories over lesser clubs sustained confidence. Several former Rochester players were called back to the city the next year, among them John W. McKelvey, who, with Nathan P. Pond and a few others, provided a batting strength that made up for deficiency on the mound. The team won 13 of 27 games, though only 8 of its victories, as contrasted with the 14 defeats, were against professional clubs. A Rochester Base Ball Association, formed the next spring with Nat Pond as president, assembled a new team and joined the 20 clubs in the International Association.

Unfortunately, the first big game of the 1877 season ended in a row. The visiting team, the Athletics of Philadelphia, was ahead, 7 to 2, in the seventh inning when the Rochesters, with no outs against them, succeeded in filling the bases. A tense crowd of 2,500 hopeful fans

watched the next batter send up a high fly to third. All the runners held their bases as the third baseman prepared for the catch. But when, after deliberately dropping the ball, he snatched it up to tag the man on third and the plate and tossed the ball to second, McKelvey, serving as umpire, called three outs against Rochester. The team, protesting the decision, left the field, while fans who had never seen the play before swarmed angrily around the umpire. It was a regrettable beginning, branding the local club as kickers, a reputation which later performances helped to sustain. Yet the team had ability and, despite its lack of a good pitcher, won third place among the six clubs which played out the full season in the International Association.

A heated debate occurred this year over the claim that some of the visiting pitchers were hurling curve balls. "Professor" Swift, Rochester's amateur astronomer, declared a curve ball impossible but later reversed his opinion when a demonstration along a wall satisfied his doubts. After further study he brought the novelty into line with the laws of physics and prompted Rochester to seek a pitcher with something on the ball—a search which ended successfully when, some time later, a one-armed twirler was engaged.

The economic problem had still to be solved. The Rochesters played only part of the 1878 season, dropping out when they fell to seventh place among the 12 teams in the league. When it became evident the next year that general support for a new team was lacking, Asa Soule, president of the Hop Bitters Manufacturing Company, purchased a professional club gathered at Albany and brought it to Rochester as the "Hop Bitters." Although they did not maintain a place in any league, the Hop Bitters played an active season, most of it on the road as might be imagined, and the record was not too disappointing. The Hop Bitters, having won admission to the National League in 1880, played more frequently on their home grounds at Scio Street, but the scores did not prove too agreeable. One redeeming feature was the team's ability to pull itself together long enough to defeat Buffalo on three occasions that season.

Four years slipped by without the formation of a team in Rochester before the organization of a New York State League in 1885 prompted a new effort. A stock company maintained a team that year which, in spite of internal difficulties, won second place in the league led by Syracuse. Reorganization was effected the following winter; a new ball

park was opened on Culver Road; and the Rochesters entered the new International League, again taking second place. The Rochesters dropped to seventh place in 1887, but by this time local fans had learned that reverses are part of the game and gave the club sufficient support to advance to third place the next year and again in 1889. An effort to introduce Sunday baseball created new dissension in the nineties, and the shift to Riverside Park north of the city in 1892 proved ill-advised, with the result that Rochester failed to organize a club during the next two years, while the 1897 and 1898 teams did not finish their seasons. Yet the city rallied the next year to win its first pennant, an achievement which was to occur with greater frequency in the next century.

Financial and psychological problems beset all the sports, but none of the others followed exactly the pattern of baseball's development. The rowing clubs retained their amateur character, thus escaping many commercial complications, and while horse racing had its full share of such problems, its major difficulties were of a different sort. Earlier games revived and new sports developed, each with peculiar features designed to appeal to special groups of citizens. By the end of the century a diversified sports pattern was fairly complete.

The popularity of the boat clubs, reestablished during the decline of baseball in the early seventies, continued for a full decade. The Riverside Club had twenty boats or shells in 1876 and added new equipment during the next four years. A new Rochester Yacht Club established a basin on the east side of the river near Summerville. Regattas were held from time to time, both by the rowing and the sailing craft, yet these spectacles failed to develop the sustaining interest of a swiftly moving game. The boatmen themselves increased in number during the eighties, and the organization of a canoe club in 1885 marked a new aspect of the development, but great boating events had passed with the seventies.

Horse racing provided the most important sports events of the period. The Driving Park Association maintained high standards, winning a reputation for the fine condition of its track. The enthusiasm of the Park's first years dropped off slightly after 1877, only to revive in 1880 and to reach a climax the next year when Maude S trotted her famous mile in 2:11 1/4 time, breaking all records before a crowd variously estimated from 15,000 to 30,000. The efforts of the police to enforce the laws against French wheels and other gambling devices

met with indifferent success, although the restraints were blamed for the loss of support after 1881 when the track seldom drew crowds of more than 10,000. The Park had been fitted out to accommodate agricultural fairs, which continued to provide annual features full of interest. Perhaps the most unusual spectacle in the Park's history was the Wild West Show of "Buffalo Bill" Cody in which 60 Indians and numerous cowboys, horses, and buffalos took part during June, 1883. Newer racing centers were attracting the leading horses, yet Driving Park survived for another decade.

Balloon ascensions, circuses, and the more numerous picnics attracted increasing crowds. Falls Field could no longer accommodate the major circuses after 1880, compelling Barnum and Bailey to lease the ball field the next year. That old, partly enclosed, amusement center, enlarged and renamed the Genesee Falls Park, operated as a summer theater for a number of years and briefly sheltered two new forms of amusement before the city's expanding industries appropriated the site.

The first bicycles reached Rochester in the winter of 1879/80. Fourteen cyclists organized the Rochester Bicycle Club in February, adopting a blue shirt and knee breeches, a white cap, belt and socks, as the official uniform. A hall was opened for practice and, late in April, nine hardy men emerged and rode boldly through the streets. Thirty had joined the club by the end of the season, and, despite the treacherous character of the early machines, sufficient support developed to enable the club to lease Falls Field for practice and exhibitions in 1883. Racing enjoyed a period of popularity, but most of the cyclists took chief delight in the regimental processions of numerous wheelmen to Charlotte and similar points of interest. The introduction of the safety bicycle at the end of the decade speeded the sport's development. Nearly 700 bicycles were sold in Rochester during 1889, perhaps a fourth of them to young women. By 1893, when the number of cyclists in Rochester had reached 5,000, their demands for improved streets and other considerations were becoming insistent. Four years later the number of bicycles in Rochester, already a city of 150,000, was estimated at 40,000; wheelpaths were constructed in the parks, and special bicycle cars were attached to all excursion trains.

An even more enthusiastic response greeted roller skates in the spring of 1884. A "parlor skate" displayed at a Rochester store in 1860 had failed to gain favor, and roller skating won its first success in

England, returning to America as a pastime for the guests at Martha's Vineyard in 1878. When its potentialities were discovered by the democratic classes, popularity was assured. Rinks were opened in Rochester and many other cities in 1884. The bicycle track at Falls Field was appropriated by the new fad that June. Four months later the city had six rinks, all of them crowded until the 10 o'clock closing hour, against which protests were mounting. Dancing teachers complained of the loss of patronage, and the attendance at saloons was said to have dropped at least a fifth. Soon a rink ball, called polo, was attracting interest. A team of girl polo players arrived from the East to engage Rochester sports in a game which faintly resembled the as-yet non-existent basketball. The game disappeared after a year or two, but roller skating retained a secure place among local amusements.

Although no other new sports stirred such immediate enthusiasm, several contributed valuable activity. The organization of an Athletic Association in 1883, with plans for regular indoor exercise throughout the winter, represented a wholesome development, re-establishing the earlier gymnasium on a broader base. The newly revived Y.M.C.A. displayed an interest in acrobatic stunts; wrestling and sparring exhibitions were occasionally announced; but the popularity of indoor athletics waited upon the introduction of basketball in the early 1890's. Five, seven-man teams, one of them already in its third season, contended for the local championship in December, 1894, and new standards of physical fitness were brought into vogue.

Curious onlookers gathered to watch a lacrosse game between rival Indian teams in 1879, the same year that walking matches attracted brief publicity, while the Jolly Archers Club, the first sports group to admit both men and women, afforded some pleasant afternoons to a restricted membership two years later. Lawn tennis began to attract the interest of the favored few in 1885, but quickly developed a broader appeal. Soon a tennis club was organized and courts were laid out on the Riley Triangle for a tournament that September. The provision of public courts in the parks in 1899 assured a democratic future for this sport.

Football, as Americans described English Rugby, was played occasionally in Rochester during the seventies, but apparently no regular team appeared until 1888, by which date the American version of football had gained sway. The Rochesters defeated all rivals that season

and promptly claimed the championship of central and western New York. A team was formally organized at the university the next fall, and, although its first inter-collegiate contest brought a disastrous defeat from Cornell, 106 to 0, in October, a successful match with the city team gave reassurance, enabling it to triumph over Syracuse University, 36 to 0, a month later. Here was a game which achieved immediate popularity with spectators and players alike. Rugby was meanwhile developing in another direction on the Continent, where, in the form of soccer, it became as dominant by the nineties as baseball in America. New immigrants, such as the Hollanders, formed soccer clubs shortly after settling in Rochester, but the Babies' Day celebration in 1909 saw the first widely publicized soccer game in the city.

A few favored residents, returning from summer vacations at Bar Harbor in 1894, brought back still another sport, the old Scottish game of golf. Two clubs were formed and a course was laid out near South Park before the end of the year. A reporter, in accounting for the game's popularity, explained that no great skill was required and that both ladies and gentlemen could derive pleasure and healthy outdoor exercise from the pastime. The Rochester Country Club was formally chartered the next February and soon began the development of a 14-hole course on East Avenue. The organization of the Thistle Club prompted arrangements for the first tournament in the fall of 1895. Interest quickened each year, and by 1899 the city was ready to lay out a public course in Genesee Valley Park.

The great contribution of these games to the spirit of the people could hardly be matched, but in the field of popular recreation still a larger part was played by outdoor amusements of a different sort. Facilities at the lake and the bay were greatly expanded, and the means for reaching them were marvelously improved. The private interests which promoted both the transport lines and the resorts naturally opposed the campaign for public parks, but the increased leisure and the growing appreciation for outdoor recreation finally persuaded the city to provide ample facilities for democratic recreation.

The local summer resorts continued to expand throughout the last quarter of the century. New cottages sprang up westward along the beach at Charlotte and inland towards the village. In addition to Summerville east of the river, a new colony was established still further east, known popularly as White City because of the clean appearance

of its white tents and cottages arranged in neat rows leading to the lake. The Rochester and Lake Ontario Railroad, the Bay line as it was called at its completion in July, 1879, increased the flow of excursionists to the bay and Sea Breeze, thus stimulating plans for a Belt line to Summerville. When that line was likewise completed in 1883, new hotels and pavilions were called for and quickly supplied east of the river.

Charlotte was again spurred to improve its transport lines. The long-discussed boulevard had already been opened, but the heavy dust of dry seasons frequently deterred a visit by carriage. Without question the most enjoyable route was by steamer from Glen House. A passenger elevator, erected there in 1878, eliminated the dizzy climb down into the gorge, while the renovation of the Glen House two years later and the building of a new excursion steamer, the "Flower City," equipped to carry 700 passengers, made the trip comfortable as well as beautiful. When the Lake Ontario Beach Improvement Company acquired the 20-acre plot at the Charlotte beach in 1883, its plans for a fine new Hotel Ontario, erected that winter, spurred the railroad to extend its tracks into the park in order to facilitate the use of excursion trains.

The crowds at each of these resorts mounted from several hundreds on hot Sundays in the mid-seventies to several thousand a decade later. Bathers were still required to keep the body discreetly covered, but simplifications of design were appearing, at least in men's bathing suits. As the number of bathers increased, a life saving crew was stationed at the pier, in 1885, though its principal responsibility was for action in the event of marine accidents. In addition to the water sports, each resort provided dancing pavilions, bandstands, shooting galleries, fish and "sausage" stands. Racing tracks and ball fields were available at two points; a Merry-go-round arrived in time, and finally a chute projected its passengers on a sled into the surf. When in 1887 the electric trolley reached Charlotte, and six years later Summerville and White City as well, lake breezes became accessible on any hot afternoon or evening.

With the improvement of transport facilities, new and more distant resort areas came within reach. The short Glen Haven Railroad opened a new resort on Irondequoit Bay in the late eighties, and the development of Manitou Beach west of Charlotte occurred a few years later. Excursions by boat or train to the Thousand Islands, Watkins Glen, and Portage Bridge were more frequent than before, and in 1884

an excursion train left for the Mardi Gras at New Orleans. Many residents bought excursion tickets to Philadelphia for the Centennial in 1876, and many more visited Chicago during the Columbian Exposition in 1893.

Summer vacations became customary among professional folk in the eighties, and boys camps began to appear in the early nineties, but few workmen as yet dreamed of such opportunities. The Saturday half holiday seemed a more practical goal. Its first appearance in Rochester occurred in 1881 when Alfred Wright decided to close his perfume factory at noon on Saturday so that his workers would have ample time for their various private affairs and be ready to attend Sabbath school the next morning. The recreational advantages were stressed four years later when a movement to close the principal stores one afternoon a week gave the clerks an opportunity to visit local resorts. One workman voiced a regret that it was only a "white collar" movement. Even the clerks did not enjoy this advantage beyond the summer months, and not every summer, yet new leisure standards were widely heralded and the movement for shorter hours of labor was encouraged.

Official recognition of the new recreational requirements came with the provision for public parks. Agitation for the acquisition of Falls Field or the river flats south of Court Street had been recurrent for several decades. A desire for economy had been the major stumbling block, even prompting the Common Council to refuse two gifts of park sites during the early eighties. Finally, in 1888, the Legislature established a Commission with power to develop a park system. Before the end of the century, beautiful Highland Park was gaining fame for its Lilacs, the rolling fields and shady groves of Genesee Valley Park were accommodating various sportsmen and picnickers, while the charming vistas and the zoo at Seneca Park were winning the admiration of visiting experts as well as residents. Public playgrounds for children were provided in Rochester shortly after the turn of the century, and that program, together with the gift of Durand-Eastman Park in 1908 and the purchase a decade later of the old amusement grounds at Charlotte for re-development as Ontario Beach park, rounded out the city's generous facilities for public recreation.