

# GENESEE COUNTRY SCRAPBOOK

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## NOTES ON SOCIAL HISTORY OF EARLY ROCHESTER

by Gladys Reid Holton

Curator of Cultural History, Rochester Museum

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## Again

Of the dozen or so Rochesterians who became internationally famous, Charles Mulford Robinson was probably the most amiable. He was in love with cities, great and small, and with their inmates, and he didn't hesitate to say so. Wrote Edward R. Foreman, a contemporary: "It was the beauty of his character—its charity and its tenderness—which nourished even the lightest flowers and graces of his style."

*Styles have changed, but we dig the message, man.*

The "Charles Mulford Robinson Collection" is the subject of an article in the Harvard Library Bulletin for July, 1967. The collection, officially known as "The Charles Mulford Robinson Memorial Planning Library," consists of "books, periodicals, clippings, and reports made by Robinson as adviser to many Ameri-

can cities," presented to Harvard in 1920 by Robinson's widow. The article, by Caroline Shellaber, gives an account of Robinson's life and work, which, however, adds nothing of importance to the brief but remarkably comprehensive biographical note by Virginia Jeffrey Smith in The Genesee Country Scrapbook of 1953.

Summarizing Robinson's first published volume on city planning, Mrs. Shellaber lists some of his major recommendations: "Parks, squares, architectural controls, protection of ancient buildings, municipal sculpture, and "parking" in business and residential sections." And she adds, "Parking" in 1901 meant trees or flowers in the center strips or along the sides of streets." Would that it did today.

# Notes on Social History of Early Rochester

by GLADYS REID HOLTON

Curator of Cultural History, Rochester Museum

The early settlers of the Genesee Country, on their isolated farms, made nearly all their own clothes. The women's everyday dresses were of wool, linen, and linsey-woolsey spun and woven at home. The men's work clothes were of the same materials but might include buckskin breeches or trousers of hemp grown along the river. A pair of cowhide boots cost \$7.00, payable in wheat at 65c a bushel. The itinerant shoemaker with his bench and kit tramped from house to house, annually covering the feet of the whole family.

In the early days the boots and shoes were made on straight lasts, and many people changed them every day to be sure of an even wear on sole and heel. Later, the storekeeper displayed ready made boots and shoes that took account of the difference between right and left.

Lucy Larcom (1824-1893) in her "Memories of a New England Girlhood" tells us that she began to knit her own stockings when she was 6 or 7 years old. No doubt she had already been informed of the tradition that every girl must have a pillowcase full of stockings of her own knitting before she married.

The first tailor in Rochester was Jehiel Barnard, who arrived from Rome, N. Y. in the autumn of 1812, the same year as the Hamlet Scrantom family.

Barnard opened a tailor shop on Buffalo St. next to the Scrantoms, and was assisted in his work by Mrs. Scrantom and her daughter, Delia, who did the sewing. Jehiel and Delia were married in 1815, in what is generally believed to have been the first Rochester wedding, though some say the wedding took place in Frankfort, a settlement farther down the river. Wedding suits for men were made of the best satinet which was 28 shillings a yard, and the usual marriage fee was one crown (\$1), though Jehiel Barnard is said to have paid \$3. The fee was payable in cash, produce, or deer tallow.

Many settlers brought clothing with them from New England. When not in use, the precious garments were generally folded and laid flat in drawers. The style of the clothes depended on the family's circumstances and the date when they left home. Quaker dress was a not unusual sight in Rochester, where the first "meeting for worship" was held in 1819.

In his "Memories of Village Days," Jesse W. Hatch writes: "The dude of the period (c. 1828) wore a white bell-crowned hat, the nap beaten with a rattan and roses blown into the fur; his neck was surrounded by a stock, the frame of which was made of bristles, to



A costume of the First Empire

keep the head erect; his coat was of blue broadcloth, cut swallow-tail and trimmed with brass buttons; his vest, buff marseilles (a stiff cotton fabric like piqué); his trousers, mouse color; stockings white; shoes, low cut, with square toes." As for the ladies, it was fashionable for them to "part their hair in the middle of their forehead, and a plentiful use of Sear's bear oil kept their 'beau catchers' in place."

That dress goods and accessories were readily available at this time is evident from the first issue of the Rochester Daily Advertiser, October 25, 1826. William M'Knight & Co., Carrol St.,



French fashion plate (1830)

advertise, among other things, "Black, Blue, Brown, and Mix'd Broadcloths & Cassimeres, Calicoes, Tartar and Circassian Plad, Camlet, Baize, Leghorn Hats &c. &c."

C. Dunning & Co. announce that they "have just opened a new and splendid assortment of Merino Long and Square Shawls, from \$10 to \$25, together with an equally rich assortment of Lace Veils from \$2 to \$12. They will always keep on hand, of the best quality, Hair Curls, Shell Combs, Thread, Laces, Head Ornaments, etc."

As life in the village became less primitive, and communication with neigh-

boring towns and the outside world, easier and more frequent, word of the latest fashions was not long in arriving. French and English fashion plates were circulated early, and after 1826 "Atkinson's Casket," later to be known under the more famous name of "Graham's Magazine," carried monthly colored engravings of the "Newest Fashions."

"Godey's Lady's Book," still more famous, began publication in 1830. But even so, and despite the help of local dressmakers, the average woman of Rochester Village seems to have had remarkably few changes of clothes. For one thing, there was little need for fashionable dress, since about the only occasion for putting on one's best gown and bonnet was to attend Sunday service.

Impoverished wardrobes weren't by any means confined to Rochester. Mrs. Trollope relates an incident that took place in the frontier town of Cincinnati where she was living in the late 1820's. In this egalitarian milieu servants were hard to find, but eventually a young woman made her appearance who was willing to "help" around the house and who forthwith set to work "in a yellow dress parsemé with red roses." "I gently hinted," writes Mrs. Trollope, "that it was a pity to spoil so fine a gown and that she had better change it. 'Tis my best and my worst,' she answered, 'for I've got no other.'"

Dressmakers and designers of the United States tends from the beginning to follow the lead of Paris, and this has meant that in any attempt to relate fashions to politics it is French history that must be consulted. Both American

and English fashions reflected the drastic change of style that took place in France after the Revolution when a single, chemise-like garment, divided into corsage and skirt by a high girdle, replaced the voluminous petticoats and tight bodices of the ancient regime.

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The basic foods were potatoes, corn, pumpkins, wheat, rye, pork, venison and wild fowl. In the "Western Agricultural Almanac" for 1822, printed in Rochester, by E. Peck & Co., we read the following advice on the growing of potatoes . . . .

"To have early potatoes, set sticks by those plants which first blossom and preserve their roots for the following year. They should be planted as soon as the ground is open and dug early before the fall rains." Domestic animals were primarily raised for muscle power, milk or wool. The apple seeds planted by Johnny Appleseed were now producing an added variety.

In "American Cookery" by Amelia Simmons, published in 1796, we read, "Eating apples were called 'pippins' because they were raised from a pip or apple seed. These varieties were Russet, Golden, Ribston and Normandy.

"The apples were of a dwarf type known as Crab. Crab apples in those days were not like the later variety of Crab apples. The Crab meant it was a wild variety." In 1818 Colonel Rochester began the cultivation of pear and other fruit trees in a large garden leading down to the river, at the rear of his home.

Honey and maple sugar were the basic sweeteners. In 1816 sugar maples were planted by Harvey Ely and John G. Bond on the west of Washington Street. Sugar cones were available at some stores and the bee skep was to be found in almost every garden. Soon a cleared area near the house furnished herbs for seasonings, the favorites being sage, thyme, sweet marjoram, parsley and savory. Under the heading of cultivated roots in one old cookbook we read, "onions, parsnips, carrots, radishes and horse radish, garlicks though used by the French, are better adapted to the uses of medicine than cookery."

In a cookbook published in 1814 "A New System of Domestic Cookery" by a Lady, we find the following rule for bread; "Let flour be kept four or five weeks before it is begun to bake with. Put half a bushel of good flour into a trough, or kneading tub; mix with it between four and five quarts of warm water, and a pint and a half of good yeast, put it into the flour, and stir it well with your hands till it becomes tough. Let it rise about an hour and twenty minutes, or less if it rises fast; then, before it falls, add four quarts more of warm water, and half a pound of salt; work it well, and cover it with a cloth.

Put the fire then into the oven; and by the time it is warm enough, the dough will be ready. Make the loaves about five pound each; sweep out the oven very clean and quick, and put in the bread; shut it up close, and two hours and a half will bake it. In the summer the water should be milk-

warm, in winter a little more, and in frosty weather as hot as you can well bear your hand in, but not scalding, or the whole will be spoiled. If baked in tins, the crust will be very nice.

The oven should be round, not long; the roof from twenty to twenty-four inches high, the mouth small, and the door of iron, to shut close. This construction will save firing the time, and bake better than long and high-roofed ovens."

The first bakery was founded by Jacob Howe in 1814. In 1816 a circular issued reads, "Jacob Howe respectfully informs the inhabitants of the village of Rochester and vicinity that he has commenced the Bakery Business in all its various branches at his bake-house in Fitzhugh Street, where he intends to keep constantly on hand a supply of ginger bread, loaf bread, Boston, and common crackers, and fancy bread for gentlemen's tables. Mr. Howe offers his services to families on terms which he is confident will be cheaper and more economical for them, than to bake for themselves; especially for those who live near him.

Silas O. Smith cleared a piece of land and sowed it to wheat and corn but as an old storyteller says, he was relieved of the harvesting by the squirrels and coons. A blacksmith was paid 10 bushels of corn for shoeing a horse.

The first patent for baking powder was not granted until 1837. One historian records the price of produce in 1817: wheat, 31c a bushel; corn, 18c a bushel; oats, 12½c a bushel; butter, 6c per pound; eggs, 6c a dozen; molasses, 10 shillings per gallon.



Old Aqueduct in the Heart of Rochester

# Rochester "The Young Lion," Child of the Erie Canal

by ARCH MERRILL

Nature gave Rochester waterfalls, filled with power, to turn many mill wheels. But it was a man-built canal, only four feet deep, which transformed a little settlement in a swamp into the fastest growing town in America, the "Young Lion of the West."

The Erie MADE Rochester. It provided a road to market for the Genesee flour ground in the stone mills clustered around the falls. It also made New York the Empire State and New York City the commercial capital of the nation. It opened the stunted backwoods to settlement. It was the most portentous event in the history of the state.

Ground was broken for the waterway which was to link Lake Erie and the Hudson River at Rome on Independence Day of 1817. That ceremonial action followed years of struggle and setbacks.

The Federal government would not contribute a penny. So the Yorkers built their canal on their own. In 10 years it had paid for itself.

Several routes were proposed. One was using Lake Ontario westward from Oswego. The Legislature in 1808 authorized a survey by James Geddes of Onondaga. He reported favorably on an inland route passing directly through the site of Rochester.

Geddes proposed bridging the curious series of hillocks in the Irondequoit Valley into an embankment 70 feet high to carry the canal into Palmyra. He also recommended crossing the Genesee by an aqueduct at Rochester.

The War of 1812 prevented any action on the proposed canal until 1814 although discussion of the project was widespread.

DeWitt Clinton, who was governor when the canal digging began and an early canal commissioner, emerged as the aggressive leader of the forces favoring the waterway. A popular name for the project was Clinton's Ditch, although he was by no means the first to conceive or advocate the idea.

Clinton's political fortunes were linked to those of the canal he championed. His enemies retired him to private life for a time and even kicked him off the canal commission. Using the canal issue as a springboard, he bounded back into power and was again governor when the canal was opened in 1825.

The 362-mile long, 40 foot-wide canal, which was dug in sections and under the contract system, reached the Genesee in 1822. A proposal to cross the Genesee 12 miles south of Rochester had been rejected and in the end it followed closely the red stakes of Surveyor Geddes.

Nathaniel Rochester, who developed

the settlement which bears his name, was an ardent champion of the canal but lived at Dansville and Bloomfield before moving in 1818, to the tract now in downtown Rochester, he and two fellow Marylanders had bought. Co-owners Charles Carroll and William Fitzhugh lived on estates in the Genesee Valley.

The first flour mill, the Red Mill, was built in Rochester in 1815 when the village had only 381 inhabitants. The population had risen to 1,200 and four flour mills were operating in 1819.

In 1822, when the first boat laden with Rochester-ground flour left Hill's Basin on the east side of the river for Little Falls, the village boasted a population of 4,274. In the first 10 days of navigation in 1823, more than 10,000 barrels of flour were shipped from Rochester.

That year also saw the completion of the Aqueduct, hailed as an engineering marvel of the time. The 804 foot span with nine Roman arches was the longest stone bridge of its type in the world. Among those who helped build it were 30 convicts from Auburn Prison. However, the Aqueduct had its flaws. It developed a leak and would allow only one-way traffic, which caused frequent fights between canalers. The structure was replaced in 19 years.

The Erie Canal was completed on Oct. 26, 1825. It was done by hand labor and largely it was the Irish who wielded the picks and shovels and trundled the wheelbarrows. There were no steam shovels, no bulldozers, or concrete mixers. But an ingenious stump puller and

waterproof lime were devised and horse scoops were brought into use.

The formal opening of the Erie Canal began with the departure from Buffalo on the morning of Oct. 26 of a flotilla led by the flagship Chief, bearing Gov. Clinton, other dignitaries and two kegs of Lake Erie water, to be poured into the Atlantic at Sandy Hook as the climax of the celebration.

In Rochester, men stood on the banks of the canal beside cannon, listening for thunder in the West. At 10:20 a.m. the Buffalo cannon spoke and the men of Rochester pulled their lanyards. Soon to the East was heard the boom of Pittsford's salute. The message was relayed the length of the canal and to New York.

On Oct. 27 crowds lined the canal banks near Exchange Street. Leading citizens and militia in gaudy uniforms awaited the arrival of the governor. At 2 p.m. the Seneca Chief, hauled by four sleek grays, trotted down the Towpath. At Child's Basin, the Rochester packet, Young Lion of the West, greeted the visitor with a ceremony patterned after the Masonic ritual.

Then came more gun salutes, cheers from the crowd and oratory, with a banquet at the Nansion House. That evening the fleet sailed eastward, joined by the Young Lion of the West with local notables aboard.

Within a year the population of Rochester grew from 4,274 to 7,669. In 1826 residents of this canal town owned 160 boats, drawn by 882 horses. It became the largest building center on the Canal.

While two thirds of its 1827 ship-

ments eastward of \$1,200,000 consisted of flour, merchandise brought back from Eastern ports was valued at more than one million. The most unusual shipment from Rochester in this period was 100 live rattlesnakes for the European market. Their oil was considered valuable. And this was long before the days of Rochester's "Rattlesnake Pete."

The graceful pocket boats pushed the stage coaches into limbo in the canal towns, just as in a few years the Iron Horse was to doom the packets. All its long life, however, the Erie carried some passengers along with freight. And it ran excursion boats well into this century. In their day the packets aroused awe by cutting the time of travel from six weeks to ten days between Buffalo and New York.

The boom reached its peak during the 1830's when the population rose from 9,000 to 20,000. During that decade the \$4 million, 27-year enlargement of the canal began.

A visitor, Capt. Basil Hall of the British Navy found "everything in this bustling place to be in motion." He noted the streets "crowded with people, carts, stages, cattle, pigs . . . the clatter of hammers, the ringing of axes and the creak of machinery." A city was rising out of what had been a mudhole.

While flour milling remained the dominant industry, there were many smaller plants and everywhere new dwellings were going up. The mill town was proud indeed of its new four and one half story Reynolds Arcade, the "Midtown Plaza" of its day. The town had two particularly elegant hotels, the

Rochester House beside the canal, and the Eagle, at the Four Corners.

Among the first new residents were the New Englanders and Eastern Yorkers who came before the canal was completed to the West. They put a conservative stamp on the character of the town. Some of the Irish who had worked on the canal remained and became stable citizens.

After the canal was completed, a stream of settlers poured through, to people the new West. A bond was forged between the East and West, insuring a Union victory years later when the Civil War came.

Clinton's Ditch made many Western New York towns, among them Medina, Albion, Spencerport, Fairport and Newark. It pumped new life into already settled communities. It led to the building of highways and boosted the value of land and farm products.

And it ended the long rivalry between Rochester and Canandaigua. The older town had to take second place although it had been the capital of the frontier. But Canandaigua got its port on the waterway. Look at a map today and note the jog which places Port Gibson in Ontario County, and not in Wayne. The village and many of its streets bear the name of prominent Canandaiguans.

The old canal is not important now except as a pleasure route. But let it be remembered that when tolls were abolished in 1882, it had earned \$42 million over and above the original cost, expense of enlargement, maintenance and operation!

# Fun at the Falls of the Genesee

by VIRGINIA JEFFREY SMITH

The Genesee river was the largest factor in the settlement of Rochester. The founders, Colonel Rochester, Colonel Fitzhugh and Major Carroll, could not resist the beauty of the waterfalls and the potential of their water power and they bought the one hundred acre tract.

Ever since then the river, within our limits, has been treated like a skeleton in the closet. The blame cannot be laid upon any one generation. We are all responsible although we are more apt to blame our ancestors. Its usefulness has never been questioned and it has been used by our industries from the mills which gave the city its first wealth to the most recent of our manufactories. We know of no other city which can boast a river which descends three hundred feet in four miles and supplies three falls within its limits.

The Upper Falls (in the neighborhood of Court Street) had a drop of ten feet which was soon reduced to rapids and then, by the present dam, to an innocuous series of pools on a rock base. It has suggested, though never rivaled, the spring flood of 1865 which destroyed two railroad bridges and left the center of the city a muddy waste.

The Middle Falls, often called the Main Falls, near the New York Central tracks is almost forgotten now for few see it, unless their business depends upon

its waters. At the foot, on the east side was Falls Field which was the recreation center of Rochester, for it was here that circuses came—sometimes as many as six in a season. Barnum and Bailey made history when they brought the "Biggest Show on Earth" by rail in 1871. It came annually until it grew so big that it had to locate in the ball grounds.

There were other attractions, such as tight rope walkers, the flying of kites, as well as local sports of various kinds.

But the most dramatic episode connected with the Middle Falls and one which became an important part of local folk lore and really put Rochester "on the map" was the coming of Sam Patch in 1829. Living in Pawtucket, he, with other boys, had jumped from the brink of the Passaic river and had acquired confidence to believe that he could excel in all sorts of dare-devil acts. He had already jumped from the rocks at Niagara Falls so his reputation was well established before he came to conquer the Genesee.

He made three jumps here; the first for practice when his only witness was his companion, Joe Cochrane. Encouraged, he circulated hand bills stating that he would jump from the rock above the falls November 8 at 2 p.m. and asking that subscriptions be given to the landlords of the various taverns in town.

Crowds lined the banks of the river and to their wild acclaim he was successful even spurning the boat which awaited him below and swimming to shore. He did not dive, but jumped from an erect position. Before reaching the water he bent his knees and then straightened them again, taking a half turn below the water. Once more hand bills were circulated "Higher yet! Sam's last jump. Some things can be done as well as others. There is no mistake in Sam Patch. Of the truth of this he will endeavor to convince the good people of Rochester and its vicinity next Friday, November 13 at 2 o'clock p.m."

He had a rude scaffolding erected above the falls, making the distance about 120 feet. Climbing up he took another drink (which may have been his undoing) and addressing the crowd of about seven thousand people on the banks he stated "Napoleon was a great man and a great general. He conquered armies, he conquered nations, but he could not jump the Genesee Falls. Wellington was a great man and a great general. He conquered Napoleon but he could not jump the Genesee Falls. That was left for me and I can do it and will." He did. Watching breathlessly the crowd saw him disappear below the water and when he did not reappear they dispersed rapidly with heavy hearts.

His body was found in the ice at the mouth of the river in March and he was buried in Charlotte cemetery.

As is so often the case, embellishments have been added. A pet bear is said to have leaped after him; some say the whole stunt was a hoax and that he

was seen later alive; others claim to have seen his ghost near the falls. The tale has been told and retold, in prose, in verse, in song—a tale which will last as long as Rochester itself. Trains used to stop for five minutes that visitors might have a glimpse of the falls through the trees.

It was not long before commercialism began to affect the flow, for Fanny Kemball, the actress, in 1833 wrote as follows:

*"The progress of life in this country is amazing. From day to day the wilderness becomes inhabited, peopled, civilized; and where yesterday the majestic woods were standing and the silent waters gliding in all the solemn solitude of unexplored nature; today, the sound of the forge and anvil is heard, the busy feet of men pass and repass, their mingled voices resound, their dwellings arise. . ."* By the time we had ordered dinner, we found we should have leisure to walk to the falls of the Genesee which have some celebrity for their beauty.

*We walked up the main street. From this, presently turning off, we followed a wider road, with houses and pretty flower gardens on each side, and reached, after half a mile's walk, a meadow skirted by a deep ravine, through which the river ran, from whence we looked immediately upon the falls. They would be, and were, I doubt not, once beautiful; but the barrier of rock over which the river throws itself into the valley below is of considerable breadth and height; but alas! the waters have been turned off to turn mills, and a thin curtain which falls over the rocks like a*



Glen House  
drawn from an old photograph

*vapoury sheet of blue smoke is all that remains of the Genesee Falls; whilst from a thousand dingy looking mills the poor little rivulets of labouring dirty channels, all stained and foaming water come rushing through narrow and hot from their work, to throw themselves into the thin bosom of their parent stream. Truly, mills and steam engines are wonderful things and I know that men must live; but I wish it were not expedient to destroy what God has made so very beautiful, in order to make it useful."*

But it was at the Lower Falls that Rochester pleasures abounded. Driving Park Road (later Avenue) was the end of the Lake Avenue trolley. There was no bridge but one could descend by a wooden stairway to the lower level and

enjoy the great view of the river, the distant town and the gorge. A group of men here built the Glen House, Rochester's first summer resort. They were Ellwanger and Barry, James Whitney and Chauncy Woodworth.

The first proprietor was Joseph A. Wolf, followed by Samuel Bennett and his sons. "A lofty elevator was built at the entrance of the grounds to convey patrons to the hotel where meals were served at all hours on the broad veranda. The bar is constantly supplied with the choicest wines, liquors and cigars."

No wonder it was a popular place. Row boats were for rent and in those pre-pollution days, it was a fisherman's paradise. Many rode to the lake and in the evening young men and maidens drifted down the current by the light of the moon.

There were also steamers which made hourly trips to Charlotte. "We have just finished the new and elegant steamer 'City of Rochester' which will run on excursions to the Thousand Islands, Toronto and any other port on Lake Ontario. This boat, in connection with the 'W. J. Wilcox' enables us to provide for a thousand people with safety. Careful officers will be in attendance." They even went around to the Bay (before the opening was filled up) going, perhaps, as far as the Newport House.

One could ferry across the river to Brewer's Landing where Eastsiders could find another "splendid line of row boats" when they descended 150 steps from St. Paul Street. Even in winter time the location was popular for you could go down the steps from Driv-

ing Park Avenue, don your skates and strike out for the lake, stopping, perhaps, for dinner at McIntyre's and then returning by train. Can you think of anything more fun than skating through the gorge with the south winder at your back?

The Glen House was burned in 1894 resulting in the death of the mother-in-law of the proprietor. It was never rebuilt and its gray ruins remained after the elevator was destroyed and the rickety steps had become overgrown and fell. It was indeed a sad relic of a once gay spot. It must be remembered that there was much more water in those days, as we learn from paintings done at the time. The flow of water had been reduced by recurrent droughts, its use for hydro electricity and the building of the Mount Morris dam.

We have noted how much pleasure, both esthetic and recreational, our forefathers had in connection with the falls. Can we ever enjoy them in the same way? In 1965 this city engaged Hammer and Company Associates of Washington D. C., to make a survey of the Genesee and recommendations for its development.

They say that the original functions of the river were water, power, transportation (with the canal and the lake), recreation and the carrying away of waste.

These have changed. The power it provides is but a fractional part of what the city needs and pollution has lessened its recreational use so that the carrying of our effluence has increased in importance. But there is another dimen-

sion in that it gives value to property along its banks. Dividing the city as it does, many an old building hide it and have become obsolescent. They can be replaced to give us more open space and finer architecture. Operation Crossroads is being carried out largely for this purpose. (Hopefully, successfully).

The old railroad tracks along the upper river should be reclaimed for public use and additions should be made to our three river parks, Seneca, Maplewood and Genesee Valley, making possible scenic vistas, paths and landings. They recommend a new park south of the Rochester Gas and Electric complex at Driving Park Avenue and another near the Middle Falls on the east side.

This has been envisaged by the Arts Council of Rochester including a large recreation field, raising the level of the island with pedestrian bridges, a restaurant, a high rise hotel and perhaps a walk under the falls. Federal and State aid is promised for open space use. New buildings along the corridor of the river would increase the local tax base. Crowded residential sections could be opened to the river, with benefit to themselves and improvement to the city for the purposes of investment, culture and residence. Certain things should be done at once with small outlay—prohibition of dumping in the river which has been done increasingly and the reforestation of its banks.

Many others of their recommendations are noteworthy and are under consideration by the City Planning Commission and will probably be implemented as soon as possible.

# Boyhood Memories of the "Ditch"

by ERNEST A. PAVIOUR

I was born almost within stone's throw of the Erie Canal, not far from the Averill Avenue bridge. To youth in the eighteen nineties and early part of this century Clinton's Ditch had glamor possessed by few other objects of interest, animate or inanimate.

A boy could stand on the canal bridge and, if the spirit moved him, heave an apple at a deck hand on a passing canal boat, and there wasn't much the canaller could do about it. He could even swim in the dirty waters without being alarmed by cries of pollution. He might catch a worthless carp in the sluggish canal; some canallers claimed to have caught sturgeon.

The Monroe Avenue locks, the only one in the 63-mile stretch to the famous five-fold ones at Lockport, were fascinating as they lifted boats from one reach to another. Boats could be examined at the basin at Eastern Widewaters at Culver Road where they were tied up while repairs were being made, supplies purchased and taverns visited. It didn't cost much in these days to get a "nose full of nickels."

There were other attractions in our area such as the Pinnacle Hills, the present location of Hillside Children's Center; Cobbs Hill, now the site of the city reservoir and Monroe County Water Authority; the brick yards with

the miniature railroad, now a housing tract on Monroe Avenue between Highland and Elmwood Avenues; Crittenden Park, a horse track where the University's Medical Center is located.

But the Erie Canal was the star attraction to many boys. It outshone some celebrities who lived on Averill Avenue. There were "Rattlesnake Pete" Gruber, who conducted a snake museum in downtown Mill Street, Algernon Crapsey, the liberal rector of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, who tried for heresy and deposed; not to mention Frank A. Jaynes, a chief of the Rochester Fire Department.

Averill Avenue at the canal was not far from Swillberg in the Clinton Avenue South section—so named because some of the residents kept pigs in their backyards. It was a thrilling sight to see the steam fire engine from the Gregory Street barn, pulled by two fine horses, rush down the unpaved street. The dinky street cars on Monroe Avenue were also horse-drawn before the electric trolley cars appeared.

At the family home at 277 Averill we had replaced the gas and oil lamps with the new house electricity. We enjoyed the luxury of a wall telephone, the inside toilet and the Democrat & Chronicle.

Here is an Erie Canal story which does not appear in Arch Merrill's "Tow-

path." A farmer, disgusted with the low price he could get in Rochester for a load of potatoes, dumped the spuds into the Erie Canal at the Alexander Street bridge.

He was arrested and fined under a city ordinance for throwing refuse in the Canal. The story later was changed by substituting the owner of a Model T Ford who became angry at the car and ran it into the canal. He was fined for dumping rubbish into the canal.

The aqueduct over the Genesee River west of South Avenue was considered an architectural wonder and brought as many visitors, as did Rattlesnake Pete's snake museum and saloon later. In Springtime, before the river was deepened and before the days of the Barge Canal harbor, it was an impressive sight to see great masses of water, drawn from the Genesee Valley, roar and splash under the arches as a canal boat with a mule team slowly crossed the wild river. This was in the days when the river overflowed into Exchange and Front Streets and merchants used row boats to reach their stores.

In the winter after most of the canal water had been drawn, the aqueduct bed was flooded and used as a skating rink. It was a popular place to go and meet your friends, much better than some of the joints which attract youth today.

In the flood of articles about the Erie Canal, one or two people complained that canallers were rowdies who freely used knives and brawled from tavern to tavern. I am not rising to the defense of the mulsteers but history does indicate

that some canal wives were proud of their mates and their part in the industrial development of the state. There arose a canal social life. When boats tied up, there were visitations and then trips to nearby amusement places. Perhaps some canallers even heard Jenny Lind sing, or Horace Greely speak, at Corinthian Hall. They could have visited the Orringh Stone Tavern on East Avenue where Lafayette and Aaron Burr ate and drank, or the Phoenix in Pittsford.

Some downtown history buildings still stand as reminders of canal days. There is City Hall, described years ago by Ryland Kendrick, professor of Greek at the University of Rochester, as a "blot on the Erie Canal." No similar architectural reflection was ever made about nearby St. Luke's Church. Guernsey Mitchell's statue of Mercury, God of commerce, and patron of travelers, atop the old Kimball Tobacco factory, (now War Memorial) seemed to be guiding the boats as they crossed the river on the aqueduct.

I vividly recall meetings of the Rochester Ad Club in the converted stable adjoining Hotel Rochester on the banks of the canal. As speakers orated, boats powered by steam, puffed by. The mule and the hoggees were being replaced.

As canal boats eliminated wagon transportation, so did the railroads battle the canal. Then in 1903 the people of New York State voted to issue bonds for \$101,000,000 to build the Barge Canal. This would permit the operation of larger boats and reduce the cost of freight transportation, and provide 524 miles of toll-free waterways.

When the Barge Canal by-passed Rochester, the old Erie Canal in the city was available for other purposes. From 1922 to 1932 the city spent \$11,662,938 to acquire the canal lands and construct the subway railroad. Governor DeWitt Clinton built the original Erie across the entire state for \$7,143,789. That was a bargain; the Barge Canal was the folly, not Clinton's Ditch. The subway railroad was no better.

About 1908 I participated in a wild canal boat ride to Utica with a boatload of collegians to witness a Rochester-Hamilton football game. The captain had a "psychedelic" time without LSD.

On February 11, 1939 the "Society of the Erie Canal" held a banquet in Albion at the town club, "one block south of swing bridge." The previous year it had met at Newport Towne House, East Avenue and Winton Road, an old canal hang-out.

The Society, the brain child of Paul ("Packy") McFarland, then publicity manager of the Rochester Community Chest, was a spoof on the Society of the Genesee, a stuff shirt dinner held annually in New York City from 1899 to about 1935. The Genesee affair was almost solely promoted by Louis Wiley, business manager of the "New York Times, a former Rochester newspaper man who was fired from the Post Express by its eccentric publisher, Francis B. Mitchell.

The Erie Canal, the Barge Canal, the subway railroad, the Eastern Expressway—one followed the other. The day may soon be here when we regret that the Erie bed was not preserved for high speed public transportation, rather than the present mess of private passenger automobiles which probably will be banned from downtown as a matter of necessity.



