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## East Avenue's Turbulent History

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

Long admired by all and jealously cherished by many citizens, Rochester's most beautiful street, East Avenue, has experienced repeated transformations. The battles raging today over its future are but the latest in a long series of controversies that stretch back more than a century and a half. Successive waves of townlot promoters, of affluent families displaying old or new wealth, of architects with varied skills and tastes, of institutions seeking to share the Avenue's prestige have vied for position along its proud course. Their combined efforts made it at one time an idyllic rural retreat, at another a race course for sporting gentlemen, at still another a parade ground for status seekers, to mention only three of a half dozen distinctive eras. But whatever the Avenue's current traits, no other street in the city more accurately reflected the changing moods and trends of Rochester's history.

### The Avenue's Rural Origins

Although the proud Avenue was still far in the future, the first of its many conflicts erupted in 1811 as the surveyors of the Town of Boyle, soon to be renamed Brighton, blazed a road from Orighn Stone's house (still standing at 2370 East Avenue)

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westward to the Genesee Falls. When Colonel Rochester rode up on horseback from Dansville that winter to make final preparations for the settlement of his 100-acre tract on the west bank, he discovered that the axemen were clearing a path that would hit the river at the brink of the main falls, not, as previously agreed, at the small upper falls where his property lay. No doubt blustering with indignation, he quickly persuaded the town officials to deflect the highway's course at the present site of the Liberty Pole so that the Road to Pittsford, as it was for a time known, reached the river in direct line with Main Street bridge, which was already under construction to connect it with his own Buffalo [West Main] Street on the west side.

That first hassle fixed the axis of Rochester on Main Street, as the western part of the road to Pittsford was renamed in 1815 when old "East Rochester" was surveyed into town lots. As the early maps show, Main Street turned at the Liberty Pole site and continued eastward to Goodman Street, which became the eastern border of the city under its first charter in 1834. The road of course continued eastward to Brighton Center and on to Pittsford. Most prominent among its early residents was Oliver Culver whose house, now the oldest in the city and relocated on East Boulevard, originally faced the Avenue and occupied the tip of the triangle where old Blossom Road forked off to the Indian Landing and thence to Penfield.

A half dozen stages trundled along this rural highway in the 1830's, pausing at Israel Blossom's tavern in Brighton Center, where passengers sometimes switched to a canal packet to enjoy a leisurely ride into the city. Farm houses made their appearance well back from the road, notably that of George Goodman, whose lane became Goodman Street; within the city modest dwellings spread eastward as far as Union Street by the late thirties when the construction of the first mansions commenced to the east.

Colonel Rochester's milltown at the falls had grown rapidly after the opening of the Erie Canal in the mid-twenties, and by the late thirties it had become the world's leading Flour City. Many of the millers and other early settlers who prospered with the town had built comfortable houses in the old Third Ward on the west side, but most of the favorable sites there were occupied by the late thirties when Silas O. Smith, the pioneer storekeeper at the Four Corners, decided to build a larger dwelling. His wife, the former Seba Hand Ward, wished to live near her Ward and Selden relatives who resided in a spacious grove north of Main Street on the eastern side of town. But with six growing children, the Smiths were reluctant to crowd the Grove Street site and, instead, purchased a five-acre plot on the southern side of Main Street a few blocks to the east. Woodside, as they called their new mansion, was erected in the Greek Revival style by a newly arrived master builder, Alfred M. Badger, who had helped to build similar block-mass houses in New England.

Woodside was not the first mansion to appear on the Avenue, however. Before it was ready for occupancy in 1841, perhaps before it was started, William Pitkin, another pioneer merchant, a druggist who had also become a banker and engaged in civic and social affairs, acquired the property across the street and erected a twin mansion there, which he occupied in 1839. Spurred by these developments, Aaron Erickson, a prosperous wool merchant, purchased the five-acre lot adjoining Smith on the town side and erected a third Greek Revival mansion, into which he moved in 1842.

We do not know who actually built the latter two mansions, but speculation points to Nehemiah Osburn, a carpenter who resided on Main Street in the mid-thirties and who listed himself as an architect in the 1841 Directory, with his house at Main and Elm Streets. This of course was the site of the gracious

Greek Revival town house that stood at the turn of Main Street (where the new Security Trust Building stands today) from about 1840 until 1893 when it fell before the march of commerce.

Whether or not Osburn, who a few years later erected the old Osburn Hotel at Main and St. Paul, was responsible for the design and construction of the early East Avenue mansions, someone with skill and taste was working on the street even before the arrival of Josiah W. Bissell in the mid-forties. It was Bissell, however, who had the inspiration and supplied leadership in the early efforts to develop the road into a beautiful avenue. On his return to Rochester in the mid-thirties, he occupied his late father's modest house on Main Street for a few years, but bought several acres on both sides of the road beyond the city line and developed a nursery on one of his plots. As contractor for the state in charge of constructing the second aqueduct, he had the job of demolishing the old first aqueduct, and salvaged enough from its crumbling remains to build the beautiful brownstone house that still stands at 666 East Avenue. Having chosen the newly popular Victorian style, he hastened to embellish its spacious grounds with elms and other trees. And to assure a proper approach to the new dwelling, which he occupied in 1845, Bissell undertook the next spring to plant a double row of horse-chestnuts from his place westward to the Liberty Pole. In addition to trees, that section of Main Street required, in his opinion, a new name, and when the Common Council rejected his plea, he tacked up a series of signs indentifying it as East Avenue.

Rochester's first Liberty Pole had in fact made its appearance in July that year, and some of the "eastside boys" who erected it as a patriotic gesture, joined a year later with property owners beyond the city limits in organizing the Brighton Plank Road Company to improve the highway eastward to Brighton Center. The City had macadamized Main Street to the city line at Good-

man Street in the mid-thirties, and the new improvement, consisting of planks, laid crosswise, with a double layer in marshy stretches, was completed by the company in 1847 at a cost of \$16,000. At this point Bissell planted additional horse-chestnut trees as far as his commercial nursery a mile east of the city, thus making the Brighton road and East Avenue Rochester's most magnificent approach.

A half dozen fine houses and a school building quickly sprang up along the Avenue. By 1852, when P. J. Browne made his detailed map of the area, he listed the aging attorney, Selah Matthews, as one of the several residents located between Goodman Street and Oliver Culver's place. J. W. Opp had opened a tavern on the south side, midway between Goodman and the toll-gate, which was located across the road from Culver's house. Elisha and Benjamin Blossom occupied two of the three houses standing between Culver and Brighton Center, where another school, a church, and several shops comprised a respectable hamlet, served by a flagstop on the railroad as well as by canal packets and stages.

In the midst of these developments in rural Brighton, important changes were occurring along the Avenue within the city. William Pitkin, who served as Mayor of Rochester from 1845 to 1847, had lost his first wife and, in 1849, married Louisa Rochester, the youngest daughter of the city's founder. The new Mrs. Pitkin soon became dissatisfied with the mansion's rural setting and persuaded her husband to move back to the old Third Ward. Azariah Boody, who bought the property in 1851, lived there while serving as Congressman from the Rochester district for two years, but in 1855 he sold it to Daniel Powers and returned to New York City. In the meantime, Josiah Bissell, whose wife, the former Julia W. Hooker, was an active member of a society of ladies who maintained a Home for the Friendless, gave his old house at the northwest corner of East

and Alexander for its permanent home in 1854. Two churches appeared nearby, Christ Episcopal on the south side of the Avenue near William Street [now Broadway] and a short-lived Methodist Episcopal chapel across the street. The community's rapid growth had prompted the city to lay out a new east Main Street extending eastward from the Liberty Pole on a line with the downtown stretch and thus finally recognized East Avenue as a separate entity.

Unfortunately the rows of horse-chestnut trees planted a few years before by Josiah Bissell had suffered severe ravages from the increased traffic. Drivers making calls along the Avenue had apparently hitched their horses to the tree trunks, and the hungry beasts had taken their pick of the lower branches or rubbed their sore necks against the bark. So many of the trees had succumbed that several gentlemen formed the East Avenue Shade Tree Association in 1852 to restore the street's fading beauty. Instead of horse chestnuts, they now chose elms and planted them evenly on both sides of the Avenue from the Liberty Pole to Culver's place. To avoid a repetition of the earlier project's fate, they carefully boxed each tree with protective slats, erected a hitching post in front of each dwelling, engaged a man to care for the trees, and empowered him to bring suit against anyone who "suffered his cattle to run at large" on the street.

Several new residences now appeared on the Avenue. John F. Bush, a dealer in staves and other lumber products, erected a house on the south side near the present Vick Park B in 1855 and sold it the next year for \$9000 to Joseph Hall, a manufacturer of thrashing machines. Hall, who owned the celebrated horse, St. Lawrence, proceeded to lay out a race course near Opp's tavern, now under the management of Charles Skinner. Farther east an additional house or two sprang up near Oliver Culver's; Jonathan Hadley, a carpenter, built himself a frame

house on the north side; and Col. Thomas C. Bates, a canal forwarder and railroad contractor who married Maria Blossom, erected one of brick on the south side. A stone's throw beyond, Dr. Elisha Miller occupied another brick house topped with a cupola which contained a bell that could be rung in times of emergency to summon help. To serve these residents and to promote closer ties with Brighton Center, an East Avenue Omnibus made its appearance in 1859 running eight round trips daily between Brighton Center and the Reynolds Arcade at the Four Corners. Thus the Avenue acquired by the late fifties an idyllic suburban charm that none of its chief rivals, Mt. Hope, West, and Lake Avenues, could match.

### **The Horse and Carriage Era: 1860-1890**

A number of Rochester developments in the 1860's brought new changes on the Avenue. First in importance, perhaps was the relocation of the University of Rochester from West Main to the east side of the city and the opening in 1861 of its first building on the 23-acre campus carved in 1853 from the rear portion of Azariah Boody's estate. The campus did not front on East Avenue, but its location only a block away enhanced land values and made the development of connecting Prince, Strathallan, and Goodman streets a prime objective. Meanwhile, the relocation of the Rochester Theological Seminary from West Main to the east side of Alexander Street, south of East, gave the Avenue an impressive building at that corner by 1865 without blocking off too much frontage. It was in this decade, too, that Hiram Sibley, who as president of Western Union had become the city's most wealthy man, chose the plot across the Avenue from the Erickson mansion as the site for his new home, into which he moved in 1868.

An important negative decision made in this decade also influenced the Avenue's future. It was in 1863, when the newly

chartered Rochester and Brighton Street Railway was projecting its lines, that property owners on East Avenue united to block an extension of tracks along its course. Instead, the company routed its horse-car line eastward on Main to Alexander and back on that street to Monroe and Clinton and Main, thus bringing its service to lower East Avenue residents without cluttering the roadway with cars. The carriages of the Omnibus Company seemed more appropriate and continued to serve the Avenue for many years.

Aaron Erickson, who represented the old Seventh Ward on the Common Council, pushed successfully for road improvements. The city installed a curbing of Medina stone in 1860 and surfaced the gutters with cobblestones and the roadway between with crushed rock as far as the city line. A flag-stone sidewalk, also laid at the expense of the property owners that year, added to the appearance of the lower Avenue. Many travelers, however, complained of the unsatisfactory condition of the road beyond Goodman Street; when residents, too, protested the neglect of the Plank Road Company to keep it in repair, the Common Council in 1869 terminated the collection of tolls. Hiram Sibley supervised the application of an additional layer of crushed stone when the city again macadamized the lower end of the Avenue in 1872, but the eastern stretch was not brought up to grade until the large annexation of 1874, which pushed Rochester's eastern boundary to Culver, enabled the city to appropriate \$63,000 for its improvement two years later.

The nature of this early road improvement merits attention. First a "large, capacious, and durable sewer" was installed in the summer of 1875. It was made of Copeland cement pipe, 30 inches in diameter, and extended 700 feet in length, the longest continuous stretch of pipe sewer yet laid in Rochester. When the old Brighton Plank Road Company protested the injury to its roadway, the city paid \$1500 in damages and pressed the



gas company to hasten the extension of its pipes while the water mains and sewers were under construction. A heavy layer of finely crushed rock was spread over the full width of the road, thus extending the macadam surface of East Avenue from Goodman Street to Culver Road, and making it, in the words of Isaac Butts, a new resident who had observed its progress with impatience, "the finest thoroughfare in the city."

New mansions and new families brought a new character to the Avenue. James McDonnell, a wholesale clothier, and Butts, publisher of the *Union and Advertiser*, built two of several fine houses near Goodman Street, while Edward Harris, an attorney, erected another in 1867, which is still standing at No. 1005. Josiah W. Bissell sold his brownstone house and nursery to his brother, Charles, before moving to St. Louis (where he built the first bridge over the Mississippi in the early seventies). On the death of Charles Bissell in 1867, his widow sold the stone house to Charles E. Upton, a banker who soon laid out Upton Park through the rear of his property. The widow of Silas O. Smith had meanwhile sold Woodside for \$25,000 to Hiram Smith, a nephew who arrived from Wheatland in 1865, and Hiram, a miller, occupied the mansion until 1870 when he in turn sold it to Frank N. Lord, a contractor and sportsman. A lover of spirited horses, Lord revived the practice started a few years before by Joseph Hall of demonstrating the speed of his favorite steeds on the Avenue. Hall had sold his race track in 1865 to James Vick who promptly converted it into a seed nursery. As a result, many of the young men who had exercised their horses there now appropriated the Avenue on fair afternoons and evenings as a race course, which created clouds of dust and brought frequent protests from some residents. That sport was especially popular in winter months when gaily colored sleighs replaced the wheeled rigs.

The depression of the mid-seventies dampened some of the Avenue's more dashing spirits and delayed the construction of new mansions, but its effects disappeared before the close of the decade. Thomas Leighton, president of a bridge building firm, acquired the old Bates house at No. 1399 and by adding a wing made it the largest mansion on the Avenue. Hiram S. Calkins, who had married a daughter of Dr. Miller, occupied his old house for a few years before it was purchased in 1880 by Harrison Lyon, whose daughter, Elizabeth, had married William S. Chapin four years before and resided in the romantic French chateau built on a spacious plot across the Avenue from the willow pond. Vick by this time had divided the old driving park nursery into building lots and was selling them off to modest home builders. Other promoters laid out Arnold Park with a strip of grass down the middle to attract residents who appreciated a quiet retreat. On the north side, Prince Street and Strathallan Park were also attracting affluent residents though few of their houses rivaled the elegance now sought and displayed on the Avenue itself.

Most of the mansions erected on East Avenue in the eighties and after must have been the work of architects, who now numbered a dozen or more in the city. We don't know which architects were responsible for some of the houses, as in the case of the Rufus Sibley and Alexander M. Lindsay mansions, built in the late seventies for the principal partners of the leading department store, but the latter house, still standing at No. 973, is ample proof of its builder's skill. Fortunately a press notice tells us that J. R. Thomas designed and built a mansion at the southeast corner of East and Goodman for Hulbert H. Warner in 1879. Striving to match the whims of its owner, the patent-medicine king, Thomas topped its "curiously irregular structure" with a "variety of towers, battlemented gables, porticos and jetting angles and windows," producing, as the re-

porter commented, "a piece of frozen music in brick and stone."

A more skillful use of architectural talent was displayed in the Alexander B. Lamberton mansion, still standing at No. 727. Designed in 1883 by Harvey Ellis, it welcomed the colors and forms of outdoor nature into the interior through a myriad of windows, as Lamberton, a founder of the Rochester Park System, may have ordered, and clearly suggested the promise of its young architect. Whether Ellis also rendered the design for Henry M. Ellsworth's mansion nearby at No. 759 is uncertain, but it too must have gratified the lumber king who resided there for many years.

Successful businessmen in several fields were hastily moving onto the Avenue. David Cory of Alling & Cory, Charles R. Richards of Richards & Weaver, and Charles H. Angel of the American Mining Company, represented paper, shoes, and chemicals respectively and brought new social interests as well. James G. Cutler, an able architect who may have had a hand in building several of the Avenue's early mansions, built one for himself at No. 766 in 1885. As the architect for the Elwood Building erected in 1874 at the Four Corners, he had invented the mail chute, and its successful operation had prompted him to organize the Cutler Manufacturing Company to produce mail chutes for installation in the increasing number of tall office buildings springing up across the land. We don't know who designed the stone mansion at No. 987, but the Granger Hollisters who moved in in 1888 represented two of Rochester's leading industrial families, he the Hollister Lumber Company, and she the Watsons of Western Union.

Several professional men were also gravitating to the Avenue. Dr. Thomas O'Hare married Mary McDonell and acquired her late father's mansion in the early 1880's, when John VanVoorhis, an attorney, resided next door at the northwest corner of East and Goodman. In 1887 Dr. John Whitbeck

engaged a young architect from Ithaca, William H. Miller, to build his house, of timber and stone, at No. 800, and its merits soon won Miller another commission from Judge Francis A. Macomber for a house in a modified version of that English style at No. 963. We don't know the architect of the George Raines house at No. 779, but its lofty windows and the severe lines of the brick work gave it a sober exterior that suggested the poker face frequently worn by the master politician who resided there for more than a quarter of a century.

These and other houses were crowding some of the nurserymen off the Avenue, but fortunately that earlier activity, represented by William S. Little and Horace E. Hooker as well as by Bissell and Vick, left its heritage of beautiful trees, including a number of copper beeches, that gave the Avenue a variety of colors almost as rich as its architectural eclecticism. (A copper-beech sapling planted by Edward Harris in front of his home at No. 1005, probably in the 1870's, now towers grandly over the same house occupied since 1929 by Thomas G. Spencer.) William Little subdivided his nursery fields but retained his residence on the Avenue where his prize magnolia tree attracted attention every spring for many years. Wide open spaces, with long vistas back through groves of young trees and glimpses of occasional fields of blooming bulbs or orchard blossoms, long greeted travelers on the Avenue in carriages and stages that afforded ample time to enjoy the view.

Few travelers in the early eighties would have guessed that back of the foliage surrounding much of the Hiram Sibley estate at East and Alexander was a "deer park and goat yard" (a pair of iron deer and several very live goats, plus a cart) for the entertainment of the younger Sibleys, Watsons, Atkinsons, and other siblings of that rapidly expanding clan. Hiram Sibley had bought the old Silas O. Smith house from Frank

Lord in 1873 and presented it as a wedding present to his son Hiram W. When Hiram W. and his wife, the former Margaret Harper of New York City, preferred to live in the metropolis, Hiram, Sr., presented Woodside to his son-in-law, Hobart F. Atkinson, who moved in with his two daughters and his new bride, the former Harriet Appleton of New York, in 1875. The mansion provided an ideal setting for wedding receptions, and two of the grandest on the Avenue occurred there when Elizabeth Atkinson married the talented short-story writer, Arthur C. Smith, in June 1879, and a decade later when her sister Marie married Henry H. Perkins. In this case both families continued to reside on the Avenue, the Smiths in a new house erected back of Woodside on newly opened Sibley Place, and the H. H. Perkinses in Woodside itself.

Events brought some families closer together on the Avenue. Shortly after an elaborate funeral for Aaron Erickson in 1880, his son-in-law, Gilman H. Perkins, moved into the Erickson mansion, thus bringing Mrs. Perkins back to her old home and their son next door to his future wife. After completing his own mansion on the Avenue, Hiram Sibley had built another on Prince Street for his daughter, Emily, who resided there, first as Mrs. Isaac Averell, and after her second marriage in 1891 to the son of her father's partner, as Mrs. James Sibley Watson. When in 1888 the Hiram W. Sibleys were persuaded at last to move back to Rochester, they built still another mansion, this one of stone, on the old Sibley estate at the corner of Alexander and East.

To preserve the delightful atmosphere thus developing on the lower Avenue, its residents had supported the city's expansion in 1874 to Culver Road so that the proper improvements could be made to that point. On their completion in 1876, the inhabitants petitioned for a regular sprinkling of the roadway from May until November. That method of laying

the dust had recently been adopted for the first time by the promoters of Oxford Street, newly designed with a park of young magnolia trees down the middle. Although Oxford was too narrow, where it crossed the Avenue, for such spacious development, East Avenue had five parked offshoots by the mid-eighties—Sibley and Granger Places, Arnold and Upton Parks, and Portsmouth Terrace, each of which attracted fine homes; by 1888 its own mansions would exceed three score in number.

Perhaps the most noteworthy and certainly the most unexpected structure on the Avenue was the Warner Observatory at the southwest corner of East and Arnold Park. Built between 1879 and 1882, at a total cost for land, buildings, and equipment of \$100,000, it was a dramatic example of the combination of scientific curiosity and promotional zeal. Lewis Swift, its sole operator and director, was a hardware merchant who had taken up astronomy as a hobby and became so proficient in the discovery of comets and other celestial objects that the Rochester press dubbed him "Professor" and raised a fund to purchase a larger telescope. Learning of this project, H. H. Warner, the patent-medicine king who had just completed his own mansion on the Avenue, offered to build an observatory on a nearby lot to be known as the Warner Observatory and to award Warner Safe Liver Cure Prizes to amateurs and professionals throughout the country. Citizens wishing a view of the heavens through its 16-inch telescope, fourth in size in the land, had only to apply at Warner's office on St. Paul Street for a Safe Liver Cure pass, which gave admittance to the only observatory in America open to the public. For a decade after its opening in 1882, many ladies and gentlemen could be seen alighting from carriages and entering Professor Swift's stone residence, for Warner had built a substantial dwelling for his astronomer adjoining the round

tower, 31 feet in diameter, which was topped on the third floor by a dome of galvanized iron, mounted with double wheels on a circular tract, to enable the Professor to turn it and the huge telescope within to any point in the heavens he wished. The wide publicity given by the press to Professor Swift's discoveries may have helped to spread the fame of the Avenue as well as that of Warner and his pills.

But if visitors marveled at the sight of an observatory on the Avenue, many of its residents took that novelty in stride, for they were now accustomed to witnessing and participating in important civic and cultural projects. Daniel Powers, comfortably settled in the oldest mansion on the Avenue after adding a third story to enhance its dignity, was periodically planning new acquisitions for his art gallery in the Powers Block; Hobart Atkinson, senior warden of St. Andrew's, presided over the board of the Episcopal Church Home, which met frequently in his parlors at Woodside; Alexander Lamberton was chairing committee meetings in his East Avenue mansion on landscape plans for the newly established Rochester Park System; the Hiram Sibleys were entertaining President Anderson and Professor Robinson and discussing plans for the enlargement of the Sibley Library's collection at the University; Mrs. Gilman Perkins was greeting the guests who had responded to her invitation to gather on December 17, 1887, to discuss the formation of a Rochester Historical Society. Every Sunday morning saw carriages setting forth from most of these mansions bound for churches downtown or across the river, but the bustle was seldom as exciting as on evenings when a new play opened at the Lyceum Theatre on Clinton Street where, after its gala opening in December 1886, the East Avenue delegation vied with the old Third Warders in sparkling display and in animated socialization during the intermission.

## **Changing Fortunes and a New Technology: 1890-1910**

Probably nobody at the time recognized it as such, but the crash of the Liberty Pole in a heavy windstorm on the day after Christmas in 1889 was the event that marked the close of an era. It was the second Liberty Pole, erected at the foot of East Avenue in 1861, a few months after the fall of the first pole. A half-hearted effort in 1890 to raise a third pole failed to win support, for property owners on the lower Avenue were now absorbed with its transformation into a business street, while those farther out were engaging in a new quest for status.

A farmers' market had long since developed around the old Liberty Pole triangle, and residents who periodically protested the congestion it created there persisted, despite the disappearance of the pole, in ineffectual attacks on the "Liberty Pole Market." The aging Nehemiah Osburn endured the clutter patiently until his death in 1892, and his gracious home, after serving briefly the next year as the birthplace of the Security Trust Company, was demolished to make way for a two-story commercial structure named the Liberty Building. Modest business establishments had already taken over most of the properties on both sides of the Avenue as far as Union Street, replacing some with new stores and converting others by adding street-level shops in front and accommodating roomers above.

Tailors, dressmakers, grocers, plumbers, dentists, physicians, and other occupants of the stores and offices fronting on the Avenue rubbed shoulders with bookkeepers, teachers, lawyers, clergymen, and salesmen who resided in the upper stories. One of the householders, Rowland Milliman, an undertaker whose casket shop was on State Street, had called some of his neighbors together in 1888 to protest the city's neglect of the lower Avenue. It was early April and great heaps of dirt and pools of mud had accumulated on the street over the winter (over a



longer period, in Milliman's opinion) and something should be done to improve the condition of the roadway. Chauncey B. Woodworth, a perfume manufacturer also resident on the Avenue, proposed its permanent improvement, of brick or asphalt as the experts might determine, but the meeting concluded with the appointment of a committee to investigate the cost of rebuilding the sewer and restoring the macadam surface.

After repeated debates the Common Council determined in 1891 to rebuild the old sewer, lay new water mains, and surface the Avenue with brick from Main to Alexander Street. It was a timely improvement for Christ Church had decided to enlarge its edifice by converting the original 1855 structure into the transept of a noble church building, which was designed in the English Gothic style by Robert Gibson, a distinguished architect brought from New York by Warden J. Moreau Smith. A banker residing next door to Woodside, Moreau Smith was no relation of the late Silas O. Smith, the original warden of Christ Church. H. H. Edgerton, who later served many years as Mayor, was the contractor. The first service in the new church was conducted on Easter Sunday in 1894 by Dr. William D'Orville Doty who a few weeks later celebrated his silver wedding anniversary at his home on Arnold Park.

Two blocks to the east, the Asbury Methodist Church, erected of brick with a stone front in 1884, was likewise engaged in structural improvements. These included, in addition to the frescoing of the walls, the installation of a new pipe organ, the construction of a new pulpit, the extension of the galleries, and the laying of a new sidewalk in front. An earlier East Avenue Baptist Church had long since moved to Park and Meigs Streets, but the 1890's brought the opening of a Christian Science Reading Room on the lower Avenue. The Third Presbyterian Church, which had acquired a lot at the corner of Meigs and East in the early eighties, building a small chapel and

Sunday school on the rear of the lot, was ready, after worshipping in these structures for a decade, to erect a stone church designed in the Romanesque style by Orlando K. Foote. The Rev. George Patton, a resident of nearby Prince Street, officiated, in May 1893, at its dedication.

Still another church made its appearance on the Avenue in the late nineties. St. Paul's Episcopal, formerly located on North St. Paul, was forced by commercial and industrial expansion to seek a new site in 1896 and found one on East Avenue where the sale of James Vick's nursery grounds presented an attractive opportunity. With both Hiram W. and Rufus A. Sibley among its backers, the church had no difficulty in pressing the construction of its new edifice to completion by June 1897. Designed in the perpendicular Gothic style by Heins and LeFarge of New York and equipped to seat 820 worshippers, it included among other features a large organ with 2554 pipes capable of filling the entire church with music. A few months after its dedication by Bishop Daniel Walker, the Rev. Murray Bartlett arrived to begin his ministry in what has generally been acclaimed Rochester's most beautiful church.

Prominent among other new residents on the lower Avenue were the city's leading social clubs for men. The Rochester Club, organized two decades before, moved from the Third Ward to its present East Avenue site in 1888, and a year later the younger Genesee Valley Club, after four years in the old Jonathan Child mansion on Washington Street, moved into a new club house erected on the northwest corner of East and Gibbs.

Farther out the Avenue, a half dozen new mansions appeared in these pre-depression years. Three at least were designed by Andrew J. Warner or by his son, J. Foster Warner, an able young architect who would shortly win the contract to build

the county's third Court House. Apparently their first on the Avenue, these three large homes present striking contrasts in style. One, erected at No. 1063 for John W. Oothout, a brewer, had marked Victorian gables, while a second, also completed in 1891 and still standing at No. 1163, provided Charles P. Barry, the nurseryman, with an imposing late Classical Revival facade. The third, definitely attributed to the younger Warner and now serving the Asbury Methodists as a church office, is a fine example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. It was built in 1892 for Wilson Soule who had recently inherited the Hop Bitters Manufacturing Company established by his late father and was off on a trip to Europe.

We don't know the original architect of the Henry E. Brewster mansion at No. 901, which was completed in 1891, nor who built the new Edward Harris house at No. 1127, first occupied in 1894, but both were extensively remodeled in later years. Harris had obligingly sold his older house at No. 1005 to Mrs. Don Alonzo Watson who, with her daughter Elizabeth, now moved in next door to her older daughter, Isabel, Mrs. Granger Hollister. The mansion at No. 740, built in 1894 for Morley Stern, president of Michaels, Stern & Company, introduced another architect, his half-brother Leon Stern, who would soon rival Warner for commissions on the Avenue.

It required substantial connections to complete the construction of a mansion that year, but of course the city's leading clothing manufacturer had the necessary stability. Some less fortunately situated had to defer their plans to build on the Avenue, but none suffered such disastrous reverses as H. H. Warner, whose meteoric rise was now matched by his precipitous fall. Unable in November 1893 to meet the payments due on many widely placed commitments, Warner faced bankruptcy, and in June 1894 his East Avenue properties were sold at auction, the Observatory, valued at \$100,000, bringing only

\$15,000 and his own family home, \$35,000. Leon Griesheimer, another clothing manufacturer, purchased the mansion, and other families with liquid assets acquired Warner's three properties on Arnold and Goodman streets, which sold for \$6, \$3, and \$2 thousand respectively.

It is difficult to measure the impact of a severe depression, yet some indication of its effects can be gleaned from the Directories. More than half the names of house holders and shop keepers on the lower stretch of the Avenue changed between 1892 and 1895. The changes were much less dramatic east of Alexander Street, but even there, in addition to H. H. Warner, the Directories tell of the replacement of C. R. Richards by Dr. Edward Mulligan and of Wilson Soule by George Eastman.

Soule was not, however, a victim of the depression; a sportsman like his father, he suffered a fatal injury in the summer of 1894 by attempting to stop a runaway horse. His widow found George Eastman able to pay the \$110,000 she asked for the mansion, and thus the founder and treasurer of the Eastman Kodak Company moved in 1895 from a more modest house at No. 13 Arnold Park to the stone mansion at No. 1050 East Avenue. The fact that Eastman's private physician, Dr. Mulligan, had moved a few years before into the Richards house a few doors away made the new location especially agreeable for Eastman's ailing mother.

Among those driven out by the depression was Professor Swift, though he apparently departed without regret, for the construction of the 140-foot tower of the Third Presbyterian Church, next door to his observatory, had blocked the view of a portion of the horizon and curbed his search for new comets. He had been somewhat disgruntled ever since his visit to California in 1887, when promoters of Pasadena had offered to build an observatory for him on the top of Mount Lowe if he

would bring his telescope out to explore their cloudness sky. Intrigued by the prospect and now deprived of Warner's support in Rochester, Professor Swift packed his telescope in a long box and early one morning in April 1894 carted it off to the freight station. He soon followed and, with his wife and son, planted in southern California the seed out of which the great Mount Wilson and Palomar observatories later developed.

Perhaps the most striking change on the Avenue in the middle and late nineties was the increasing number of cyclists that appeared in the street. Young men who could not afford a horse could buy a bicycle, and groups of them, and a few young women too, found the level course of East Avenue ideal for an evening or a Sunday afternoon spin. Three of the vacant stores on the lower Avenue in the mid-nineties became bicycle shops by 1900, and to serve the new clientele, two of the eight saloons of the mid-decade became confectionary stores specializing in ice cream. A change not widely observed occurred on the Sibley property, where the former "deer park and goat yard" gave way to an enclosed and covered bicycle rink on which the younger Sibleys and their friends rode their wheels.

The cyclists took the lead in agitating for a new resurfacing of the Avenue in these years. They were especially critical of the congestion and the poor state of the roads around the Liberty Pole triangle where, they complained, a man could not safely ride his bicycle on market days. But their arguments were not too persuasive, for many citizens were similarly annoyed by the cyclists. The reckless "scorcher" who crashed into Judge William Shuart near his home on the Avenue, in June 1897, smashing both bicycles and breaking the Judge's leg, was unusual only in the selection of a judge for his victim. The police equipped two officers with wheels in an effort to enforce the ordinance adopted the previous November, which revived the old six-mile speed limit and applied it to all traffic except

that on East Avenue from December 15 to March 15, between two and five in the afternoon, when as in the past, sportsmen with cutters were given free reign.

If the cyclists had little success in the agitation for a new improvement on the lower Avenue, they did help to bring action on its eastern end where Brighton Center had been incorporated in 1885 as a village. The old Brighton Congregational Church had been rebuilt, after a fire in 1868, and now faced the Avenue where two carriage factories and several smaller shops and stores created a thriving activity. When in 1898 the village trustees offered to pay a third of the cost of macadamizing the road from Culver to the railroad crossing, provided property owners in the city would pay the other two-thirds, it was not taken up, yet the joint demands of the cyclists and residents brought results a year later. The Rochester assemblyman, W. W. Armstrong, was co-sponsor of a bill authorizing the expenditure of state funds on road improvements, and at its passage the next year, Monroe County hastened to submit an application for funds. As a result East Avenue, the first in the county to receive this aid, was also the first in the state, which in turn made it the first in the nation, and the macadam surface laid from the city line to Brighton Village in April 1899 attracted wide attention.

New residents had begun to appear on this eastern section. When the W. W. Chapins, who had built the French chateau, moved back to the old Third Ward to occupy the Edmond Lyon mansion on Fitzhugh Street in 1880, they sold the chateau to Charles J. Wichman a clothing manufacturer. Young Edmond Lyon brought his bride, the former Caroline Talcott, to live with his father Harrison Lyon at No. 1441 in the late nineties and after his father's death Edmond Lyon had the house remodeled and enlarged in 1910. Meanwhile Thomas B. Ryder of Sibley, Lindsay, and Curr, acquired and enlarged the

old Thomas Bates house next door, which Thomas Leighton had occupied for almost three decades. The four Ryder children were delighted on their first day in the new house to find a pony tied in one of the stalls in the barn and a newly painted pony cart magically ready for use.

Across the road, William E. Sloan, a hardware and plumbing merchant, and James S. Havens, an attorney soon to be elected to Congress, engaged Claude Bragdon and Charles Carpenter respectively to design their houses at No. 1250 and No. 1370. Their construction in the early 1900's, when George Eldredge erected his mansion some distance beyond, at No. 1570, established a new street line on the northern side and prompted the removal of two older frame houses in that section. One, removed to make way for the willow pond on the Eldredge lot, was hauled over to Park Avenue where it served for many years as a private school for girls; the other, the old Culver homestead, was moved by Howard A. Smith, its occupant at the turn of the century, to the east side of the newly opened East Boulevard. Another frame structure, the Elisha Y. Blossom farmhouse at No. 1400, was still occupied by his widow and daughter.

The early 1900's were busy years for architects and contractors along the Avenue and made it virtually an avenue of Presidents. Leon Stern finished three houses, perhaps more, in these years. He designed a large brick mansion for Albert Vogt, president of the Vogt Manufacturing & Coach Lace Company, who had acquired and demolished the former home of Dr. O'Hare to clear the site at No. 566. Stern completed that mansion in 1900 and another only slightly less grand at No. 875 for Abram J. Katz, treasurer of the Stein-Bloch Clothing Company. Whether Stern built the house at No. 1099, which Chauncey B. Woodworth, president of a perfume manufacturing company, occupied in 1901, is uncertain, though he did remodel it on two

later occasions; he did, however, receive a commission that year to build another mansion for Edward Bausch, president of Bausch & Lomb, on the site of the old Butts residence at No. 663. These impressive mansions were nevertheless overshadowed by the dwelling erected at No. 693 by Otis O. Crandall of New York in 1901 for Col. Henry A. Strong, president of the Eastman Kodak Company. To prepare the site, it was again necessary to remove an earlier brick house occupied for two decades by Patrick Cox, the shoe manufacturer, but that action seemed justified when the new mansion, with a Japanese tea house and lily pond in back, was for a few years unquestionably the most elegant on the Avenue.

Compared with these lavish places, the house built by Claude Bragdon for George Buell, the wholesale grocer, at the southeast corner of East and Berkley in 1902, and that erected a year later by J. Foster Warner for Walter S. Hubbell, the Kodak attorney, appeared relatively modest in style as well as in size, yet the activities of their residents were anything but subdued. Hubbell, for example, was busily engaged with Cutler across the street and with Joseph T. Alling, still living on Goodman Street, in plotting the strategy of the Good Government League. The George Buell family, which had previously occupied two other buildings on the Avenue as well as two in the old Third Ward, had many and varied ties with the economic and social life of the city.

Of course the major event on the Avenue in these years was the erection of the Eastman mansion at No. 900. Designed by J. Foster Warner in consultation with McKim, Mead, and White of New York City, it was built, as some workmen later recalled, under the watchful eyes of George Eastman, who dropped by almost daily to check on its progress. Dismayed at one point by the sound and confusion created by the operation of a mechanical sander, he ordered the work to be done by hand



and, after inspecting the finished job, directed the men to re-finish the entire floor with a spokeshave. The completion date had to be postponed several times as new emergencies arose, but finally the pipe organ was installed, and the great mansion was ready for its housewarming reception on October 8, 1905, at which George Eastman entertained 120 business guests at a sumptuous dinner served to the accompaniment of organ and orchestra music.

George Eastman's mansion was not the first on the Avenue to possess a pipe organ, for the Granger Hollisters had had one built into their house during its construction in 1888. Moreover, H. H. Warner among other residents on the Avenue had presented recitals of chamber music before Eastman began to feature such programs. And although it soon became evident that none could match the Kodak king's splendor nor rival the pull of his invitations, high standards of luxury prevailed on the Avenue. One young girl, seen walking demurely along the Avenue, followed a few steps behind by a middle-aged man in livery, recalled when asked about it years later that, as an only child, she had been permitted to walk, followed by the second butler, to Park Avenue once or twice a week for an ice cream cone. On being pressed for further details, she recalled, as reported by Henry Clune, that the household had employed thirteen servants, consisting of three butlers, three gardeners, two chauffeurs, one cook, one laundress, two upstairs maids, and one personal maid for her mother.

Assisted by similar if seldom quite as extensive staffs, the residents on the Avenue achieved an elegance seldom dreamed of elsewhere in the city. The William S. Kimball mansion in the Third Ward and at least three on Lake and three on Mt. Hope Avenue rivaled most of those on East and its tributaries, but they were surrounded by more modest homes. Already the elegance attained on the Avenue was threatened, however, by

the new wealth that supported it, for the presence of two chauffeurs in the above list, rather than a coachman and stable hands, marked a change in technology that was transforming the lower portion of the Avenue and would eventually revolutionize its entire way of life.

The battle on the lower Avenue had commenced in 1900 when the Regas Vehicle Company opened a showroom at 66 East Avenue to display a model of Wood's Electric. On February 20, that year, the actress, Rose Coglan, in her shiny electric, raced a horse and sleigh out the Avenue, finally pulling ahead as the horse tired near Brighton Village. This and other early races seemed sporting at the time, but by 1904 the city was forced to send a policeman equipped with a stopwatch to check speeders on the Avenue. Thus on April 1, the officer reported that twelve men had been identified (including George Eastman's chauffeur) as racing along at twenty miles an hour, although the speed limit was now eight miles an hour. It was not a light matter, as Simon August could testify after a speeding motorist frightened his prize horse, valued at \$1000, causing him to bolt, wrecking the carriage and suffering an injury that made it necessary to shoot the horse. So many protests arose because of accidents of this sort that the police finally in 1906 placed two patrolmen on motorcycles and dispatched them to East Avenue where on October 3, 1906, they made their first two arrests.

Many residents on the Avenue hastened to buy one of the new cars — gasoline, electric, or steamer. George Eastman acquired one or more of each, but declined in 1901 to serve as president of the newly organized Automobile Club. Many of the proud owners of Rochester's 1000 cars in 1905 hastened to display them on East Avenue, and soon its road surface became so broken that a new improvement was necessary. Most Avenue residents, even those with cars, had retained their carriages,

and many accordingly desired a resurfacing with crushed rock, which was safer for horses than the asphalt preferred by autoists and cyclists. A committee of Avenue residents investigated and debated the question for many weeks in 1906. Although George Eastman, as its chairman, leaned to asphalt, James G. Cutler, who had now become Mayor, persuaded the Common Council to accept the decision of a poll, which showed 47 out of 84 Avenue residents as favoring the macadam surface. The improvement was finally completed and the Avenue was reopened on June 5, 1907, but amidst the general rejoicing one reporter noted some concern by observant residents about the recent appearance of the elm tree beetle on the Avenue.

The resurfacing operation extended from Alexander Street to slightly beyond the railroad crossing in old Brighton Center, for the Village had been annexed in 1905 to permit its residents to tap city sewers and water mains. A campaign to remove the trolley tracks from the stretch between Colby and Winton, which had extended the Park Avenue line into the Village, was blocked by the desire of some of the city's new residents for this convenience too. The desire of some merchants on the lower stretch of the Avenue, from Main to Alexander, for trolley service had been silenced by the hasty completion of its asphalt resurfacing in 1906, but the need for improved transit persisted and brought the first proposal of a bus line that year. Although that service was not instituted for another sixteen years, the old farmers' market was abolished at this time.

A half dozen new mansions filled most of the remaining gaps along the central portion of the Avenue and one more appeared beyond Culver. Claude Bragdon designed a three-story house in the Colonial Revival style for Edward G. Miner at the corner of East and Argyle where the newly elected president of the Chamber of Commerce took up his residence in 1906. Four large mansions opened their doors the next year,

all on the north side of the Avenue. Two stood east of Walter W. Powers (who now occupied the Pitkin-Powers house), the English Tudor mansion of Erickson Perkins at No. 494, and the residence of William B. Ellwanger built next door by Robert S. Byers in a twentieth century post-colonial style. Several blocks to the east, George D. B. Bonbright engaged McKim, Mead, and White of New York to design a half timber and half stone mansion at No. 950, while Mrs. Ruth C. Bartlett had an even larger one of brick erected at No. 1010, which she soon sold to Dr. Ralph Fitch. George W. Todd, president of the Todd Company, occupied his new home at No. 1475 in 1909, and Louis Ettenheimer moved into the one designed for him by Leon Stern at No. 460 the next year.

Each of these newcomers added something to the Avenue's diversity. Ettenheimer, a jeweler, had a house that was more suggestively modern in spirit than any other on the Avenue (though it was no match for the Frank Lloyd Wright house, also built in 1909, for Edward E. Boynton on East Boulevard, which now attracted a number of substantial dwellings); Erickson Perkins and Bonbright, both brokers, had old local and new national ties respectively; Mrs. Ellwanger and the Fitches had wide but different social interests; both Miner and Todd were rising industrialists, each served a year as president of the Chamber of Commerce, both were devoted patrons of the University, the first as a bibliophile, the second as a fund raiser.

Other newcomers in some of the old mansions likewise brought new interests. Thus Ernest R. Willard, who married Marie Perkins after the death of her first husband and became the master of Woodside, was the chief editorial writer of the *Democrat and Chronicle* and a noted dramatic critic. Andrew J. Townson, who bought the Soule mansion from George Eastman, was treasurer of the Sibley, Lindsay, & Curr store, and George W. Ham who bought the Vogt mansion was

president of a lantern company, while Frank Ritter, for whom Leon Stern designed a beautiful house at No. 947 in 1907, was president of the Ritter Dental Company. Augustine H. Cunningham, president of the James Cunningham, Son & Company, producer of carriages and automobiles, now occupied the mansion erected at No. 1000 many years before for his father, Joseph T. Cunningham. Scarcely a major Rochester industry was left unrepresented on the Avenue, by either its president or its treasurer, and no major faith, for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews now nodded respectfully to each other from adjoining properties. The Avenue had successfully accomplished numerous transformations and faced the future with high confidence.

### **The George Eastman Period**

A major basis for East Avenue's confidence in 1910 was the new interest George Eastman displayed in many phases of the city's life. His increased concern for hospitals, dental clinics and other welfare agencies, his mounting interest in scientific and musical education, and his growing faith in civic and municipal research brought a steady stream of visitors to his mansion and increasingly made it the vital center of Rochester affairs. Yet the Avenue never for a moment became Eastman Avenue. Its older traditions were too strong, and its new trends, some opposed by Eastman, were too powerful to be overridden by one man. George Eastman, like all its other residents, had to adjust to the Avenue's ways.

Few years saw more changes than the early 1910's. The new macadam pavement of 1907 was already breaking up, by the spring of 1911, but since nobody stepped forward this time to champion the horse, the city moved swiftly to pave it with asphalt, installing new and improved street lamps as the work progressed. To complete the improvement, the city renumbered

all the houses and removed all wires from Main Street to the city line.

It was on lower East Avenue that the most dramatic changes occurred in these years. James G. Cutler formed a realty company and bought four deteriorating properties on both sides of the street making them available to developers in order to upgrade the Avenue to the standards set by the Cutler and Triangle Buildings both erected on the north side in 1897. He organized the East Avenue Improvement Association pledged to make it "the cleanest and brightest street in the city." Some merchants revived the earlier campaign for a trolley or bus line, but others opposed it because of the narrow width of the roadway. To remedy that situation, the city, at the suggestion of the Improvement Association, moved suddenly in April 1913 to cut down all the trees from Main to Alexander Street. The axemen had the job half done before friends of the trees could organize a protest, and then of course it was too late.

The street was considerably widened as a result, and new plans for its improvement were announced. The Hippodrome Amusement Company acquired a site at the Chestnut Street corner for a new cinema, which opened as the Regent in 1915. The University Club leased a house on Chestnut Street, just off East, and plans for still a fourth clubhouse were announced. In order to fix a permanent boundary for the business portion of lower East Avenue, Hiram W. Sibley in 1914 bought the northwest corner lot at Alexander Street from the Home of the Friendless (which shortly removed to a more spacious site east of Brighton Center) with the object of erecting a business block there to match the Sibley Building already projected across the Avenue.

As the prospects of lower East Avenue brightened, a new threat to the rest of the Avenue developed. Mounting land values near Main Street stirred the hopes of some property

holders farther east. Thus the owner of the long-vacant observatory received an offer in 1910 from a New York firm, which proposed to erect an apartment on the site. The opposition of neighboring residents successfully blocked that and other plans for multiple dwellings east of Alexander Street, but only by securing purchasers with suitable objectives: Col. Henry Strong avoided such a threat by acquiring and clearing the lot next door and extending his frontage to Oxford Street; across the Avenue, Senator Thomas B. Dunn responded in similar fashion when the lot next to his home was put up for sale. The need for zoning restrictions was evident, but efforts to adopt such an ordinance were blocked by those interested in erecting a number of tall buildings downtown.

It was in December 1913 that the first plan to build a high-rise apartment hotel on lower East Avenue appeared. Although its site, just east of Chestnut Street, aroused no objections, the promoter's inability to acquire sufficient land blocked action there, and several years slipped by before other promoters were ready to move ahead with construction on the adjoining lots. The war and a succession of building labor strikes further delayed until 1921 the completion of the Rochester Gas & Electric Building and the Sagamore Apartments. By 1925, however, when the long-contemplated Hiram Sibley Building, designed by Shepley, Bulfinch, and Abbott of Boston in the English Renaissance style as a memorial to Hiram Sibley, was finally built at Alexander Street, most of the gaps in store fronts of the business blocks on the lower portion of the Avenue had been filled, and its prosperity seemed assured.

Many of the businessmen in this district viewed the increased volume of traffic in the street with confidence. Automobiles, mounting in number in Monroe County from 12,700 in 1915 to 82,500 ten years later, funnelled in an endless stream through Main Street and made East Avenue one of its largest tributaries.

The appearance of a "wooden policeman," the first in Rochester, at the Chestnut Street corner in August 1915 signaled the community's recognition of a new problem. The police painted white crosswalks, again the first in the city, at that corner in 1922, and a year later they hung one of the first overhead traffic lights at the intersection of East and Main. Despite the flood of cars, only two of the city's 150 gasoline stations had located on the Avenue, and despite a ban against parking below Chestnut and Gibbs streets, that problem did not in 1925 seem critical.

Although few residents took note of the fact, the increased stream of automobiles was transforming the entire Avenue. The last private carriage disappeared without attracting public notice sometime after 1915 when Mrs. Frederica Elwood, whose strawberry roan horse had long been a familiar site on the Avenue, finally gave up driving her phaeton because of the crush of cars. George Eastman had disposed of his last horse a decade before, giving it to John P. Caley, owner of the blacksmith shop at the Winton intersection where his horses had been shod for many years; Caley's daughter, Elizabeth, had proudly driven it for a few years more. Most of the carriages had been crowded off the Avenue before the city paved it with asphalt in 1911, and even the traditional wintertime season, when sportsmen from all parts of town gathered to race their cutters on the Avenue, was abolished in 1913 when the city undertook to plow the snow from that highway too.

In step with the changes on the Avenue, George Eastman moved in December 1913 to establish a new tradition. He may, indeed, have had a double purpose in sending out 1200 invitations for a grand New Year's Eve party at his East Avenue residence, for few of those invited would decline, and rumor has it that Mrs. Warham Whitney faced a slim attendance at the customary party in her Goodman Street mansion that evening. Some who boldly attended both parties did so with the



knowledge that social leadership on the Avenue was changing, and that the standards of admission had broadened to include those who cooperated with the new civic goals of George Eastman. His Sunday musicale, started a few years before, featuring George E. Fisher at the organ with Herman Dosenbach leading a string quartet, supplied another tradition for the Avenue. As his interest in music developed he purchased the privately supported Institute of Musical Art in 1917 and presented it to the University of Rochester as the nucleus of the School of Music he established two years later. In 1918, after enlarging the music room by literally sawing his mansion in two and pushing its rear portion back ten feet, he installed a new pipe organ and brought Harold Gleason to Rochester to serve as his private organist and to teach at the Eastman School of Music now under construction on Gibbs Street a few steps from lower East Avenue.

Excitement mounted along the Avenue as the new school and the adjoining Eastman Theatre brought talented artists and professors from many lands to instruct its students and to enrich the social and cultural life of citizens ready to entertain them. The prestige East Avenue enjoyed attracted additional families and prompted the construction of a dozen new mansions. Local and out-of-town architects vied for commissions as the presidents or treasurers of rising new firms sought a place on the Avenue. Most of them also demanded spacious estates, and in two cases at least this necessitated the demolition of earlier mansions now considered out of date.

Again Leon Stern secured the largest number of commissions. He designed the house at No. 1316 erected in 1912 for Samuel Weil, treasurer of Michaels, Stern & Company, and that at No. 1350 erected in 1918 for Eugene M. Lowenthal, president of Max Lowenthal & Son. He also designed one at No. 747 built in 1915 for John Elbs, president of the Star Egg Carrier

& Tray Manufacturing Company, and supervised the demolition of Rufus Sibley's mansion at No. 930, preserving only the ground floor ball room around which a large post-Colonial mansion was erected in 1927 for Charles F. Hutchison of the Eastman Kodak Company. Herbert Stern, a nephew and former draftsman for Leon Stern, designed a mansion for his brother, Henry M. Stern, soon to be named president of Michaels, Stern & Company, which was built at No. 1501 in 1913, and a few years later built a house for himself at East and Brunswick. William Miller of Ithaca designed a large mansion built in 1915 at No. 935 for Kingman N. Robins, treasurer of Associated Mortgage Investors, Inc. Otis W. Dryer, an architect who in 1915 had remodeled and occupied an old house farther out the Avenue at the Penfield Road intersection, designed a Georgian mansion for Moses B. Shantz, treasurer of the Moses B. Shantz Button Company; business reverses, however, forced Shantz to sell the house, at No. 1132, shortly after its completion in 1913, to George C. Schlegel, treasurer of the Schlegel Manufacturing Company. Other local architects designed houses too, such as that built in 1912 for Daniel Cooper, president of the American Laundry Machine Company, and those built the next year for Philip Clum, president of a brass foundry, and DeWitt Richards, vice-president of the Lucas & Dake Company. But George Morgan, treasurer of the General Railway & Signal Company, engaged Albro and Lindberg of New York to design his home built in 1913 in a modern English style.

New families were moving into some of the older mansions as well. Young Harper Sibley and his wife, the former Georgianna Farr, moved into the remodeled home of his late grandfather at No. 400 in 1912, as Walter W. Powers, a few years earlier, had occupied his late father's mansion nearby. Schuyler Colfax, Jr., a dealer in photographic supplies, acquired the old

Brownstone house at No. 666 and made a home there for his father the former vice-president under Grant. Edward Rosenberg, president of Rosenberg Brothers, clothiers, acquired the French chalet at No. 1545 from his competitor, Charles Wichmann, in 1915 during a slump in the market. James G. Comerford, president of the Fahy Market, bought and occupied the former home of George Raines who had now moved to a new development on Westminster Road. George S. Hogan, a clothing dealer, purchased the still older home at No. 789 from the widow of George Weldon, a dealer in wall paper. Many Avenue mansions were occupied for longer or shorter periods by the widows of their former owners, as was No. 947 by Mrs. Frank Ritter for a year following his death in 1915 before she sold it to the Catholic Diocese as a home for Bishop Thomas F. Hickey.

Other changes occurred when a church or club acquired an old residence. Thus the Genesee Valley Club purchased the old Erickson mansion from the widow of Gilman Perkins in 1916 and built an addition in back for dining purposes before moving in the next year. The Century Club, Rochester's first social club for women, did not, at the moment, need to enlarge the Vogt mansion purchased from George W. Ham in 1913. Only one additional church appeared on the Avenue in these years, the Church of Christ Scientist. It bought and removed the old W. F. Cogswell residence at the corner of Prince Street in 1910 and erected a handsome edifice designed by Edwin S. Gordon of Gordon and Madden. The architect's original plan, cast in the Romanesque style, was withdrawn at the request of the church, and a new design was prepared in the Italian Renaissance style to permit the adornment of the front with four majestic pillars that have now added dignity to the Avenue for a full half-century.

In spite of the grandeur of the unbroken archway of elms stretching eastward for three miles from Alexander Street, most residents on the Avenue in the late twenties were becoming concerned for its future. As the number of automobiles in Monroe County mounted to 110,000 by 1929, the traffic on East Avenue flowed in an unending stream that became swollen at morning and evening rush hours into a sluggish flood of idling motors and impatient drivers. Residents had to wait for a break in the stream to ease their limousines out of private driveways, and strolling on the Avenue lost some of its charm.

Yet newcomers and occasional visitors, accustomed to the crush of traffic on all streets, saw few of these drawbacks and continued to exclaim over the Avenue's loveliness. A dozen new mansions were in fact added in the late twenties and early thirties boosting the total to almost a hundred before the tide finally turned and an era of decay set in. Most of the new homes were built on the eastern portion of the Avenue beyond Culver where new and high-priced cross streets were laid out—East Boulevard, and Douglas Road, matching Brunswick, Oliver, and Argyle to the west. Again local architects vied for commissions. Herbert Williamson designed two in 1930, one in the post-Colonial style for Eugene H. Langie, president of the Langie Coal Company, and an adjoining one in half-stone and half-stucco and timber for John Stevenson, treasurer of Fashion Park. J. Foster Warner designed one that same year for Richard Ford, president of the Ford hotels, who built at the corner of Douglas Road. Edwin S. Gordon designed another built across that road for Arthur F. Reed, president of the Reed Glass Company. Arthur Headley built three, one at 1490 for Milan Frank Pratt, president of the International Chemical Company, another for Robert Douglas, president of the Pectin (Serto) Corporation, and a third for his own occupancy.

New families were appearing in several of the older man-

sions. George W. Hawks, vice-president of the Wollensak Optical Company, had in 1920 acquired the house built by Warner at No. 1286 for Dr. Newton M. Collins two decades before. By 1925 M. Herbert Eisenhart of Bausch & Lomb had moved into the Sol M. Weil mansion at No. 1316, and Joseph T. Alling of Alling & Cory had occupied the Brewster mansion at No. 901. Leon Stern was busy that year remodeling the long unoccupied Elisha Y. Blossom homestead at No. 1400 for Arthur Lowenthal, president of the Max Lowenthal & Sons knitting goods company, who moved in the next spring. The movement quickened in the next five years as Harold C. Townson, secretary of the Stecher Lithographic Company, occupied the Brownstone house at No. 666, Libanus Todd, president of the Todd Company, acquired the late Col. Strong's mansion at No. 693, James E. Gleason, president of the Gleason Company, purchased the Cutler mansion at No. 766, and Thomas G. Spencer, treasurer of the Hollister Lumber Company, remodeled and moved into the formerly vacant Harris-Watson house at No. 1005.

Yet in spite of this steady influx, the rate of outward migration had increased and after the onset of the depression left eight houses unoccupied east of Alexander in 1930, double the number five years before. Several Avenue residents cooperated with the "Todd plan" for the creation of part-time jobs during the depression, but none matched his outlays for new landscaping in the garden back of his mansion where a brick wall and fresh plantings of bulbs and rose bushes and other shrubs created a lovely memorial to his efforts. The depression nevertheless deepened and vacancies mounted to twelve by 1935, and the city's losses in unpaid taxes created an additional concern.

Of course the severest blow to the Avenue came on March 13, 1932, when George Eastman, convinced that his work was done and fearful of a debilitating infirmity, quietly took his

own life. A host of mourners from near and far joined those on the Avenue and crowded the funeral services in St. Paul's Church to overflowing. In his will, Eastman gave his mansion to the University to be used for ten years as the home of its president, and the aging Dr. Rush Rhees reluctantly moved in a year later. But the sumptuous entertainments of former years had ended.

### **The Avenue's Time of Troubles**

Most residents on East Avenue had welcomed the automobile and rejoiced for a time in the increased luxury it brought. In the twenties, however, many became concerned over the congestion the mounting number of cars created on their once-sedate street, and some began to seek new homes on the quiet byways leading off the Avenue. Eager to accommodate them, land promoters laid out a number of attractive side streets east of old Brighton Center. By the late twenties a number of the sons and daughters of Avenue families were locating on Grosvenor, Pelham, Council Rock, and Clover Road or on the eastern end of East Avenue itself, and more prosperous newcomers were seeking lots there than within the city limits. Ambitious promoters were laying out still more spacious and secluded subdivisions—Ambassador Drive, Sandringham Road, Allen's Creek Road, Knollwood, but many lots remained unsold and most of them undeveloped when the depression suddenly checked this outward migration.

Hard times after 1929 checked the sale of new cars and curtailed their operation, thus bringing some relief to East Avenue. The depression's impact was more direct on some Avenue residents, several of whom had to seek more modest quarters. Eager replacements were for the first time hard to find, as we have seen, and the vacancies continued to mount. Alarmed by the loss of taxes, the city amended its zoning

ordinance in 1932 to permit the construction of apartment houses on the Avenue east of Alexander to Upton Park, which was reclassified as a D-1 Residential zone. To further stimulate its recovery, the city installed new and higher street lights in 1938, replacing the inefficient globe lamps, and resurfaced the pavement.

The response, however, was not enthusiastic. As Public Works Commissioner William H. Roberts observed, "The finest residential street in America is going to seed for lack of attention by many of its property owners. Homes that are no longer occupied are looking run down. Weeds are growing in what should be the finest lawns in the nation." Stung by the indictment, some of the Avenue's residents and its many friends rallied in the early forties to secure new safeguards. Noting that only one developer had ventured to erect a new apartment house, replacing the long-vacant home at No. 520 next door to Mrs. Ellwanger, the newly formed East Avenue Association urged the city to abolish the D-1 Residential zone and make a new effort to restore the Avenue.

Endorsing that move, the Rochester Society of Architects proposed a dramatic new East Avenue Plan. Rochesterians, the architects argued, favored free-standing homesteads, not apartments, and the city should recognize the impossibility of restoring the Avenue's tax values by a reliance on multiple dwellings. It should also recognize, they argued, the probability of increased traffic density following the war and the likelihood that more mansions would be abandoned. To meet this multiple challenge, the East Avenue Plan, adopted by the City Council in 1943, replaced the D-1 zone with a broader F-Residential zone designed to transform the Avenue into a beautiful parkway and to preserve its best qualities as a public asset.

Toward this end the city demarked a strip of land 260 feet deep on both sides of the Avenue from Alexander to Oxford

and a wider strip from Oxford to Colby, as F-Residential. Within this strip only one-family residences, churches, and other public institutions would be permitted to locate, and these only of the proper character. The restrictions drastically reduced the sale value of the land, but safeguarded its amenities for those residents who wished to remain. Under the plan the city offered to accept unwanted properties and declared its readiness to clear and maintain such lots as park land, which would ultimately provide a broad green-belt parkway entrance to Rochester.

The city accepted the new plan with high hopes. Already several developments on the Avenue appeared to favor its realization. Both the Rochester Historical Society and the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences had acquired new homes on the Avenue, the Society in the old Woodside mansion through the generous bequest in 1940 of Mrs. Willard, and the Museum in a new building given by Edward Bausch and erected in 1941 on a spacious plot adjoining his house on East near Goodman. These years brought an announcement by the Asbury Methodists of a plan to build a new church on the site of the Yates home at No. 1040 where a deep and spacious lot would permit a setback of 200 feet. In addition to the Genesee Valley Club, the Loyal Order of Moose, and the Century Club, all previously located on the Avenue, the Rochester Academy of Medicine announced plans in 1939 to move into the Edmond Lyon mansion at No. 1441, and the Carmelite Monastery into the Hayes mansion at No. 1530.

All of these uses were compatible with the new plan, and its proponents rejoiced when three additional properties were given to the city for park use. Friends of the Avenue rejoiced again when the newly formed George Eastman House, Inc., reopened that mansion in 1949 as a museum of photography. A generous gift by George B. Dryden, providing for the erec-



tion two years later of a 600-seat theatre to the rear of the mansion, added to its popular use as a display center for historic photography and films. Its spacious grounds and lovely gardens helped to make the new institution a favorite center for community receptions as well as for photographic events.

Yet some other developments on the Avenue were less propitious. The ravages of the elm tree beetle were becoming apparent, and a few blighted trees had to be cut down. Several unsuitable variances that had previously crept in were disturbing, among them the Earl V. Sleight Mineral Bath at No. 596 and the Old Manse Restaurant at No. 809. Two old homes had been converted to rooming houses by 1940, and two more made the shift in the next five years. Most of these provided attractive facilities and drew a high grade of residents, but their cars soon overflowed the inadequate parking provisions. The late forties brought the conversion of the Ellwanger home into the headquarters of the Visiting Nurses Association, the home of Mrs. Grace Hoyt at No. 1430 into the Hillel School, and the Granger Hollister mansion into a dormitory for the Harley School. Each of these commendable uses added to the demand for parking and, with the conversion of still another mansion into a rooming house, intensified the pressure for a new change of policy.

The city's tax returns were dropping, as expected under the plan, despite a decrease in the number of vacancies to eight in 1950 and to three five years later. By 1955, however, architects and builders had revised their views of the community's needs and desires, and many, now convinced of a demand for modern apartments, were pressing the city for permission to build them on the Avenue.

As these pressures mounted, other developments undermined the second basic objective of the East Avenue Plan—to preserve it as a spacious parkway for smoothly flowing traffic. The moderate increases anticipated in the early 1940's were so quickly

surpassed by the surge of new automobile registrations in the county and throughout the state that even the divided highway commenced at Bushnell's Basin and projected across the state was quickly remodeled into a non-access Thruway. By 1949 the Rochester city planners had reached agreement with the state on an Expressway entrance into downtown Rochester in the old Subway and Erie Canal bed. Although the completion of this project was still several years in the future, the City Council, recognizing that the need for an expanded East Avenue parkway was eliminated, finally succumbed in 1950 to the pressure for apartment houses. Amending the zoning ordinance, it reserved only one-half mile east and west of Culver Road for single residences, opening the rest for multiple dwellings.

Rapid developments followed. The early fifties saw the construction of a three-story apartment row, extending back through the deep lot at No. 688 and bordering the lot of the old Brownstone house, which was now undergoing reconversion as the living center for the Methodist Home for the Aged with plans to erect a dormitory in back. The St. Mary's Russian Orthodox Church acquired the Ettenheimer mansion at No. 460, and the St. Peter and St. Paul Albanian Orthodox Church the David Cory house at No. 706, both with intentions of preserving them. The Eastman School of Music purchased, at a bargain price of \$50,000, the Hutchison mansion for a dormitory, and the Health Association acquired the old Lindsay homestead for its headquarters. Three additional homes were converted into rooming houses, and three more mansions were demolished for future construction.

The lower Avenue, too, was undergoing rapid changes. A fringe area of the central business district, it had been hard hit by the migration of small shops and stores to the suburban shopping plazas. The Sagamore Apartments, long since remodeled as the Sagamore Hotel, had been acquired and re-

decorated by the Sheraton chain, but the competition of outlying motels was threatening to drain off its clientele and to depress the Avenue as well. In response, the Sheraton would a few years later, add a motel wing complete with a diminutive pool and a pool-side snack bar. But the lower Avenue's chief problem lay to the east, between Chestnut and Union, where vacancies and decay were clearly evident.

Because of these and other circumstances, pressure mounted along the Avenue for more commercial uses. Young Harper Sibley, Jr. requested and secured permission to erect a motel on the old Hiram W. Sibley lot where the old stone mansion, vacant for over a decade, had recently been demolished. Since the Treadway Inn erected there in 1953 was designed in the Colonial Revival style with the hope that it would meld into the atmosphere of the lower Avenue, as set by the Harper Sibley home next door and the Genesee Valley Club across the street, friends of the Avenue withheld their fire on this request. They protested with vigor, however, when other applications for a variance appeared, one requesting a permit to build an apartment within the single-dwelling zone at East and Buckingham, and another for a gas station at the Park Avenue intersection. The Planning Commission rejected these latter requests, but pressure continued to mount.

To meet the threat, a new Citizens Association for East Avenue, taking a realistic approach, announced its support for modern apartment and institutional developments but appealed in 1957 for the creation of an Architectural Commission to assure the proper design and the quality of all new construction. Although the City Council rejected this plea, claiming a lack of sufficient power, the Association continued its pressure, and Mrs. T. Banford Jones, its outspoken secretary, appeared at numerous hearings to protest requests for variances for a high-rise apartment house in one case, for commercial users in

three other cases, and for the proper preservation of the old Powers mansion in still another series of public meetings. Its success in several of these efforts was encouraging, notably when after some delay the Boy Scouts of America agreed to undertake the restoration of the Pitkin-Powers mansion as the headquarters for its Otetiana Council.

Yet the dimensions as well as the urgency of the Association's program were revealed in 1957 when the City Rehabilitation Commission reported finding 29 among the 100 houses inspected east of Alexander Street to be in violation of E-Residential zone standards. An enterprising journalist, after canvassing a number of rooming houses, reported that a majority of the tenants, while pleased with their location, were critical of the make-shift arrangements imposed on roomers in old houses and hoped for an early opportunity to rent modern apartments on the Avenue. An official count found only 48 dwellings on the Avenue between Alexander and Colby occupied as single-family residences. Responding to these and other pressures, the City Council, in the course of drafting an amended zoning code, abolished the old E-Residential zone and included most of East Avenue in a new R-4 residential zone, which permitted low-density elevator apartments and prescribed certain height and frontage requirements.

The Citizens' Association for East Avenue secured a strengthening of the frontage requirements in the amended ordinance, but failed again to persuade the Council to create an Architectural Review Board. Even the height restrictions proved flexible when the city granted its consent in 1958 to the erection of an eleven-story apartment house at No. 1600 and again a year later for the one built at No. 1000 on the site of the old Cunningham mansion.

By 1960 when E. Willard Dennis of Sibley, Lindsay, & Curr succeeded Joseph J. Myler as president of the Citizens' Asso-

ciation, it was battling with its back to the wall. In addition to the six mansions already displaced by new apartment houses, another fifteen had been converted to apartment or rooming houses, and twenty-five had been taken over as institutional headquarters or dormitories. Several of the institutions had resident caretakers, and at least two, the Cenacle Retreat House in the old Col. Strong mansion and the Methodist Home in the Brownstone house, had added residential wings, while two others were serving as school dormitories. Thus the residential density on the Avenue had mounted sharply, though, because of the spacious lots and those left vacant, none, at least of the newcomers, felt crowded.

And indeed most of its residents in 1960 were newcomers to the Avenue. Only a few old families remained, and of these only three included a president or president of the board of a Rochester firm. The younger generation of the old families and the new crop of presidents had located elsewhere. The Avenue's future already depended on the new residents and on the character of the functions it would attract.

Many of the newcomers were as concerned as their predecessors over the functions to be admitted. The opening of the Expressway had greatly reduced the flow of traffic permitting a reasonable expansion of activity. But applications for a variance to establish a second motel, this one at No. 1500, and a second high-rise apartment, this one of 16 stories at No. 1400, were vigorously opposed by the Association and rejected by the city. The city also refused to issue a permit for a business block at the corner of East and Strathallan, though it did grant a number of variances, two for a cluster of doctors' offices, another for an architect's office, another for a bookstore. Finally in 1965, after a long and bitter controversy, the City Council overrode the decision of the Planning Commission and granted permission to the Rochester Joint Board of the Amalgamated

Clothing Workers to erect a new headquarters building on the site of the Cutler-Gleason mansion demolished for that purpose.

As on many previous occasions, some old friends of the Avenue were ready at this point to give up the struggle as hopeless; others, however, girded for renewed efforts to restore the Avenue's fading beauty. The Association, backed by the Landmark Society of Western New York, determined to renew its efforts this time in the form of a restoration plan to safeguard as much as possible of the Avenue's architecture and history and to promote high standards for all new construction.

Several developments lent a measure of encouragement. The Museum of Arts and Sciences announced its plan to erect a handsome Planetarium on the adjoining Bausch property. Each new project engaged an architect who professed his determination to produce a building worthy of its place on the Avenue. As in the past, tastes and styles differed, and the new churches as well as the new apartment houses presented almost as much variety as the mansions they had displaced. Few residents perhaps would agree as to which of the new structures merited first prize, though the new Security Trust Building erected in 1964 on the site of the old Liberty Building, where Osburn's home had stood many years before, received much praise for its modern style and colorful decorations and for the spacious tiled plaza made available at the busy intersection of East and Main Street.

Perhaps no structure on the Avenue stirred more controversy, however, than the new Liberty Pole. Erected on the old liberty pole triangle as part of an urban renewal project, it was designed by James H. Johnson who won first prize in a statewide contest for a plan to beautify this focal and commercial center of Rochester. The stainless steel pole, 198 feet high and supported by a graceful meshwork of wires, has attracted a flood of criticism as well as praise, as befits a symbol that marks

the close of one era and the opening of another.

The Liberty Pole's symbolic function is especially applicable to East Avenue, which is today entering a new and more democratic era. Almost the only president still living on this former Avenue of Presidents is President W. Allen Wallis of the University of Rochester, and he resides, not in the Eastman mansion, which is now a museum open to the public, but in the more modest house built by Claude Bragdon in 1902 for George Buell at the corner of East and Berkley.

East Avenue has lost more elms than presidents, though the decimation has not been so severe. Almost a hundred of these century-old trees, ravaged by the elm-tree beetle and other maladies, have been toppled by the city foresters in the last decade. Fifty maples, ten oaks, and a half dozen other trees have also been removed in these years, but the city has replaced most of them with healthy new plantings, 104 trees in number. On the lower portion of the Avenue, the city has planted trees, too, in thirty large and handsome cement tubs, and as some of the first European mountain ashes withered, it has replaced them with cedars. The new varieties, together with the many elms that remain, and the now mature copper beeches on a score of lawns, assure the Avenue's unrivaled loveliness for many years to come.

Old families continue to occupy a dozen of the mansions—Mrs. Georgianna Sibley at one end of the Avenue and Miss Helen G. Ryder at the other—lending a gracious charm to the changing life of the street. Several leading citizens reside in Avenue apartments, Arthur Hughes and T. Carl Nixon, for example, and most of their 1000 or more neighbors are well-to-do members of the middling and upper brackets of the community. Yet the Avenue today has an increased diversity that includes all creeds as well as many social and economic ranks, and through its institutions touches all facets of the city's life.

Its daytime inhabitants and nighttime residents, drawn here for widely varied motives, have a common interest in preserving the very special qualities that still make East Avenue one of Rochester's proudest address.

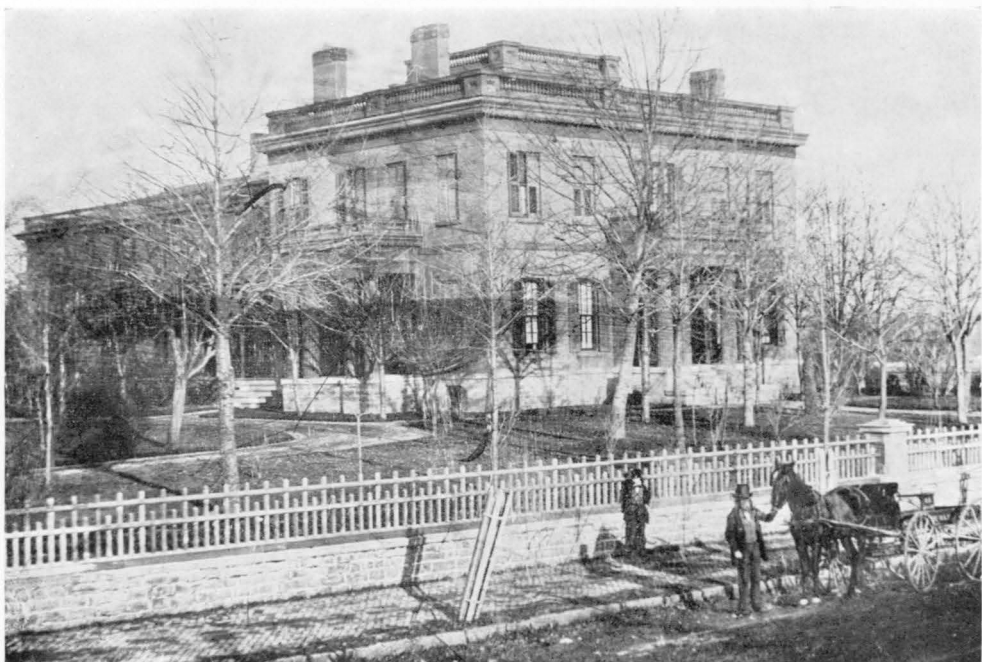




The Oliver Culver House  
Built at Culver and East, 1805-1818  
Moved to East Boulevard in 1906



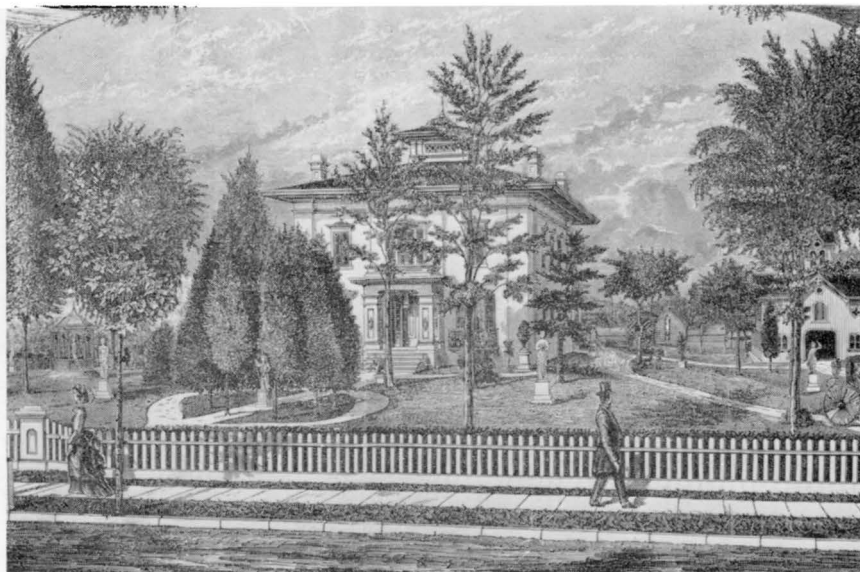
Woodside built for Silas O. Smith, 1838-41  
Headquarters of the Rochester Historical Society



Built for William Pitkin, 1838-39  
Later enlarged by Daniel W. Powers  
Headquarters of the Boy Scouts



Nehemiah Osburn House, 1841-1892  
Built at the corner of East and Main  
View in the 1880's



Hiram Sibley House, 1868  
View taken in the middle 1870's



Brownstone House  
Built by Josiah W. Bissell in 1844-45  
Now the Methodist Home for the Aged



Old Liberty Pole in the 1880's  
The First Liberty Pole erected in 1846  
Gave way to this second pole, 1861-1889



Old Union Tavern in 1860's  
Built at the corner of East and Vick Park B  
in the early 1850's for J. W. Opp



Built for Col. Thomas Bates in 1850's  
Later occupied by Thomas Leighton  
and since 1903 by the Thomas B. Ryder family



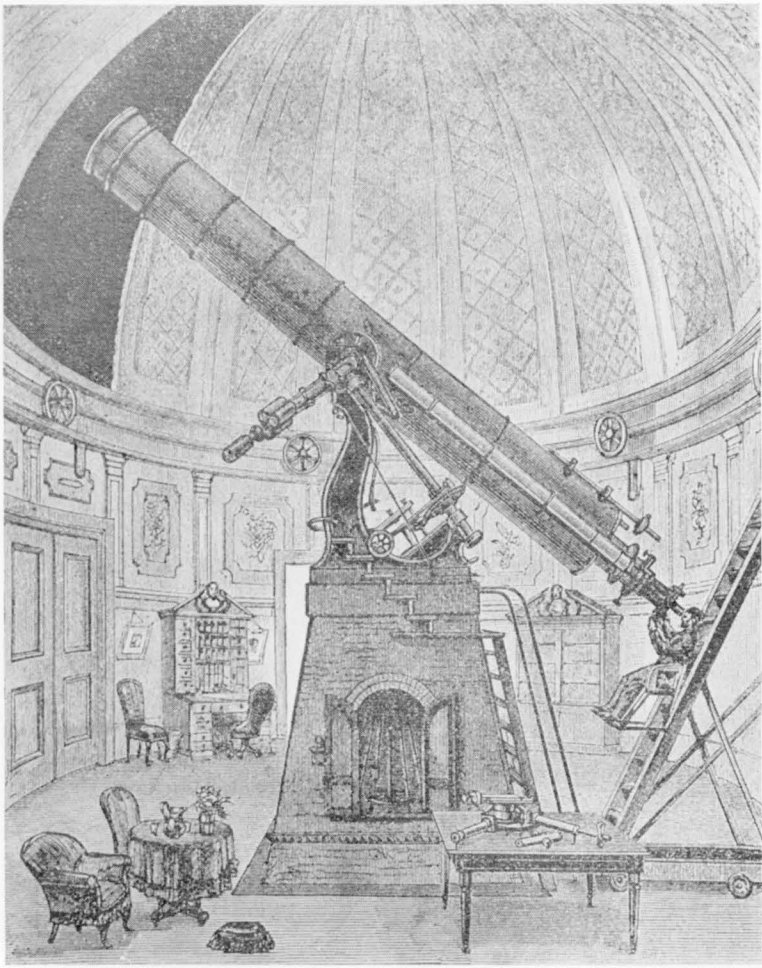
Vick's Nursery in the 1870's  
Built for Joseph Hall in the late 1850's  
Acquired by James Vick in 1865  
Site of St. Paul's Church



H. H. Warner Mansion  
Built by J. R. Thomas in 1879 at Southwest  
corner of East and Goodman



Built for Joseph Harris, 1868  
Occupied since 1925 by Thomas G. Spencer  
View in the 1870's shows the beech tree  
as a sapling, it is now fully grown



Interior of Warner Observatory, 1879-1893  
Built for Lewis Swift by H. H. Warner  
at the southwest corner of East and Arnold Park



Built for William Chapin in 1878  
Later occupied by the  
Edward M. Rosenbergs



The Rochester Club  
Moved in 1888 into this house  
Built for A. Carter Wilder in the late 1860's



The East Avenue Elm Trees  
Planted in 1852 by East Avenue  
Shade Tree Association