

## The early history of Rochester, Wisconsin.

Ela, Ida L.

[Rochester, Wisconsin: Ela family], 1935

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THE EARLY HISTORY OF

ROCHESTER

WISCONSIN

by

IDA L. ELA

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## FOREWORD

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In the year 1903 the village Study Club of Rochester assigned to Miss Ida L. Ela "The Early History of Rochester" as subject for a paper to be presented to the Club at one of its meetings. This paper, prepared with care and using in part facts gained from pioneers then living, has been a valued source of information on village history.

In response to an effort made for its preservation by the Woman's Study Club of the centennial year, the members of Miss Ela's family are presenting a limited edition of the published manuscript to the village library as a centennial gift.

Prepared for publication by Mrs. Mary E. Willard.

Changes made in the original manuscript are few. Locations determined by landmarks of 1903 are redefined; a few additional incidents are introduced; the story of the plank road and the statements regarding the civil organization of the township and the source of its name are expanded to incorporate facts now available.

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## EARLY HISTORY OF ROCHESTER

At the time the history of Rochester begins, Wisconsin was still a part of the territory of Michigan. The portion now Wisconsin contained no white settlements, unless the trading posts at Prairie du Chien and Green Bay, with their military posts Fort Crawford and Fort Howard could be called such. There were also groups of adventurers in the lead regions of the Southwestern part, attracted by the mineral found there.

It was not until after the Black Hawk War, in 1831-32, followed by the cession of the lands now Southeastern Wisconsin and North-eastern Illinois, that white men began to make homes in this section of the country. The Potowatomies, of whom the land was purchased in 1833, were to hold possession until 1836; but early in the fall of the year before, pioneers found their way into the region, ready to make claims the moment the land was open to them. Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine, Janesville, Burlington and Rochester made their first permanent settlements within the same year.

It was in the fall of 1835 that two enterprising and adventurous young men, Levi Brown Godfrey and John B. Wade, knowing of the opening up of these lands the coming year, made their way, on foot, around the southern shore of the lake from Whitmanville (now La Grange), Michigan, to which place they had come from still further east some years before. Their purpose was to establish themselves in the new country which offered home and plenty to those of undaunted energy and courage.

In those days the essential feature in the location of a town was good water-power, that there might be mills for sawing timber and for grinding grain. These men had for their objective point, a place on the Fox (then Pishtaka) river, known as the "Lower Forks", now Burlington. Arriving, they found parties from Southport,--now Kenosha, in possession of the claims they desired, having preceded them by but a few days. Learning there of the "Upper Forks", as the place where Muskequack River and the Fox joined five miles above, they went on. Pleased with the location, Mr. Godfrey located his claim there. It comprised all the present village of Rochester west of the river.

Their first night they camped on the west side of the river a quarter of a mile north of the present Main street, a hollow a few rods west of the Waterford road. Their camping place was back of the site of the house known successively as the Cooper, Kilpatrick, and the Davis residence.

Mr. Godfrey at once proceeded to build a cabin. It was a rough, log shanty, 16 ft. square. By the village plan of 1838, this wilderness location became the northwest corner of State and West street. Here, years after, he built for himself a commodious frame house which in later years was purchased by Mr. Gehrend and occupied by him until 1906, when it was replaced. The log cabin was the first building for civilized habitation in the town of Rochester.

Mr. Godfrey was but 25 years of age. A brief sketch of his earlier life may not be amiss. When a very young child he was left fatherless, and from the age of twelve earned his own support, working very hard for a meagre living. When fourteen, he was employed by a man who promised to send him to school, but failed to do so to the bitter sorrow and disappointment of the eager, hopeful boy. He never after received other education than that which the experience of life afforded. But he made the most of his opportunities, and by life-long industry won the esteem of his fellow men and secured for himself a well deserved competence for his declining years. He had married when about twenty years of age, Miss Sarah Whitman of Whitmanville, Michigan, and later enlisted and fought in the Black Hawk War.

In the spring of 1836, he brought his family to the little log hut in the wilderness--a humble home it is true, but with a setting of surpassing beauty. Throughout this whole region of country were magnificent oak-openings, entirely free from underbrush,--carpeted, in season, with green turf and many kinds of wild flowers. Winding through this scene of beauty, within short distance of the little home, was the shimmering river, then a clear, rapidly running stream.

For the first six weeks after her arrival, Mr. Godfrey did not see a white woman, the one nearest living thirteen miles away at Call's Grove, now known as Ives' Groves. But during the year others arrived.

Among the settlers of 1836 were Martin C. Whitman and son, L. O. Whitman, Gilman Hoyt, G. M. Gamble, Merrill Fowler and sister, William B. Wade and wife, George E. Duncan, Philander Cole, Seth Warner and wife, and her sister, Mary Skinner, and Tristram Hoyt, with son, George Hoyt and daughter.

L. O. Whitman, then sixteen years of age, took up a claim lying just west of the present village of Rochester. He put up the body of a small log cabin to hold his claim until he should return the following year to take full possession. When he returned he found the claim jumped, the man in possession having a home built, considerable land broken, and crops raised and harvested. He did not try to dispossess but quietly took another.

Merrill Fowler took a claim a few miles west of the village near the Honey Creek Road. This included the farm now owned by E. S. Ela, whose father bought it of David Merrill Fowler, on his first trip from Plainfield to Wisconsin in December, 1838, when he came to "take a look". Mr. Fowler also made a claim for his father, Benjamin, who came later. A part of this claim--the Schade home--remains in the family, in the third generation. The Fowlers, though from Vermont, had first settled in Plainfield, Illinois. Several times a year the father came overland with ox-team to bring supplies. Merrill Fowler's sister, Nancy, came with him to be his housekeeper, but before the year closed, married Mr. Philander Cole. This was the first marriage in the town of Rochester. Mr. Cole walked to Racine for his license and paid four dollars for it. The Fowlers were the proud possessors of the first cupboard with doors. Every woman caller gave it envious and interested inspection.

William B. Wade's claim was just south of the present village of Waterford, on the west side of the river. His limekiln at the north bend of the Waterford road was one of the old land-marks.

It was in a log house on this claim, February 3, 1837, the first white child in the township of Rochester, and in Western Racine county was born--Samuel B. Wade. He became a prosperous farmer.

Mr. Wade the next year exchanged claims with John Bloomer, who lived on the farm later owned by Mr. Edward Anderson, near Vienna. He sold this to Judge William Berry and moved to Illinois.

Seth Warner located on land northwest of the village, beyond the village school house. He was the first Justice of the Peace. His son was the first white child born in the present village of Rochester.

Mary Skinner soon became Mrs. George Duncan. They were married in a little house on the east side of the river where now stands the Holding home at the northeast corner of Water and Main streets. With true pioneer hospitality they invited the settlers from far and near, to the wedding feast of ginger-bread and water.

Tristram Hoyt laid claim to land a few miles west of Rochester, on the Honey Creek road. Longknown as the Squire Hoyt farm, it afterwards became

the property of the Kilpatrick brothers for many years. His little daughter of thirteen years, afterwards Mrs. Allen Stetson, was his housekeeper. It was her custom, so it was said, to rise early, get breakfast and the mornings work out of the way that she might go with her father and brothers to the fields, where all day long she followed them at their work, fearing to remain alone in the cabin because of the great number of Indians prowling about.

The first bridge was built in this year, 1836, by Ira Rice and John T. Palmer. It was a pole bridge without sides. Mrs. Horace Frost told of her terror on crossing this bridge when she first entered Rochester. "The oxen kept slipping on the poles", she said, "and I was fearful lest they should fall." "I never crossed it again", she emphatically added.

Early in this year Mr. Godfrey, the moving spirit of the pioneer town, seeing the need for a public house for the accomodation of incoming settlers, built a large, double log house for that purpose. It stood south of Main street near the intersection of Main and Front streets. This became known far and wide as "Godfrey's Tavern", and was the first public house opened in western Racine County. It was at this log tavern the celebration "Godfrey's Convention" was held. This was the first political convention ever held in the Territory of Wisconsin--which had just been organized that year.

The territory comprised the present states of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and part of Dakota. Milwaukee county consisted of the present counties of Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Walworth and Rock. At the first session of the legislature many important matters were to be considered. The location of the capitol was to be decided upon, and certain counties were to be organized --among them Racine county. It was therefore deemed very necessary that just the right man be elected for this legislature. Milwaukee also was working for a candidate alive to her interests. Feeling ran high. Excitement throughout that whole section of country was intense. Delegates came from long distances to attend the convention--some it is said, losing their way in the wilderness and never finding the cabin.

The convention was a great event to this small town of some two dozen inhabitants. Mr. Godfrey, to prepare for his guests, went to Skunk Grove, near Racine, and bought an ox for beef with which to feed the delegates.

Dr. Cary, then postmaster at Racine, was president of the convention. The delegates remained two nights, sleeping on the floor in their blankets. Mr. Gilbert Knapp, of Racine, nominated at this convention, was elected after a fierce contest. The nominee of the "Godfrey Convention" thus became one of the two councilmen from this district in the first territorial legislature which met in Belmont, October 25, 1837. During the session, Racine County was established, with boundaries including Kenosha County which remained with it until made a separate county in 1850.

In January of 1837 occurred the first death in the village--that of Mrs. John B. Wade, sister of Mrs. Levi Godfrey and Mrs. L. O. Whitman. Mr. Wade's home was on the west side Waterford road, midway between Rochester and Waterford, on the farm now belonging to Mr. George Ela. She was buried near her home.

In June of this year, Mr. Martin Whitman brought his family from Michigan, having returned for them the year before. They lived for a while in an addition to the "log tavern" built to receive them. Soon after, he built a house on the lot at the southwest corner of Main and State streets.

In the fall of 1837, Mr. Whitman built the first sawmill. He operated this for two years, until it was burned. It stood a short distance east of the bridge that crosses Muskego creek.

Among those who came this year were Thaddeus Earle, Alonzo Snow, Horace Frost and James Gipson. Alonzo Snow, of Vermont, opened the first store in

the place. It was on the corner of Main and Front streets. Thaddeus Earle, also a son of Vermont, made a claim in the western part of the township near Honey Creek where he lived until the time of his death. Mr. Horace Frost, also from the "Green Mountain State", took up a claim now comprising his son's farm, and that which belonged to Mr. Frank Hoyt. Later he said the western portion but retained the hills and vales among the Kettle Range,--in miniature like old Vermont. Mrs. Frost long remembered the trying trips to Rochester. There were no roads and the only way lay through big sloughs where, as she expressed it, "it did seem as if the oxen would go out of sight".

The first church society was organized in 1837. It was of the Baptist denomination. There was no regular minister but services were held as often as one could be procured, and wherever most convenient; often at the home of Mr. Martin Whitman, sometimes in the north room of the log tavern and later, more regularly, in a log house that stood on the hill north of the village, a little to the southeast of the present school house. This log house was also used for a school. It is claimed that the first religious convention held in the territory, was in Rochester in this year. Mrs. Frost was a member of the choir at these Baptist meetings. Her's was for many years considered the finest contralto voice in this part of the country, while Mrs. Archibald Cooper's was noted as the finest soprano.

Among those who came in 1939 were William Lewis, Hiland Hulburt, Horace Andrews, Hilliard Healy and their families, and Miss Mary Whitman. Hiland Hulburt was the second to open a general store in Rochester. He built a store that is still standing, in its ninety-sixth year though in decrepit condition. Originally, it was on the south side of Main Street, then was moved to its present location, directly opposite on the northwest corner of Front and Main streets.

An old cellar on "Scott's Hill" marks the site of the home of Hilliard Healy, or Lord Healy as he was commonly called, because of his manner and his claim to succession to such title. The father and daughters possessed some artistic ability. Devoid of means, and considering labor menial, they lived in much destitution in their picturesque location among the hills. Both daughters later became known as artists.

Miss Mary Whitman became Mrs. John B. Wade, and in later years, Mrs. Robert Adams. She was long and closely identified with the interests of Rochester and active in all enterprises for the good and advancement of the community. She died in the fall of 1896, having lived here nearly sixty years.

In 1838 a school was opened in the old log house before mentioned as a place for religious services. It was taught by Mr. Ira Atkins. The next year Miss Dyer, sister of Dr. Dyer, of Burlington, taught there. These were private schools and lasted but a few months each year. J. D. Wright, who came in 1840, attended a school in the old log cabin. He stated that Mr. Taggart was his first teacher, and holds vivid recollections of the fresh stock of willow switches the teacher culled each morning on the way from his cabin on the Nolle place--beyond Muskego bridge, on west side of road.

Mr. Godfrey built a frame hotel where the present one stands on the south side of Main street, in Block 23. This is said to have been the first frame house in the village. It was in this hotel, the year it was built, that the first postoffice established in Rochester, was kept. Mr. Godfrey was postmaster. Mr. Otis Whitman circulated the petition that gave him the appointment and was afterward his duty. Later the postoffice was moved across the street into a small one-story building erected for that purpose. The deputy postmaster said: "The postage on a letter then was 6¼, 12½, 18 ¾, and 25¢, graded according to distance. A letter at times was three weeks in transit from New York". Newspapers were paid for by the quarter, but he did not recollect the postage.

The mail was at first received weekly. The main line ran by stage from Racine to Janesville, passing through Burlington. From Yorkville to Rochester it was carried on horseback. Benjamin Pierce of Yorkville, carried it for many years. One can imagine the intense interest with which anything in the way of reading matter was received. The story is told of a Rochester woman in those days, who, while rolling out her biscuit dough, became so deeply absorbed in thought of what she had just been reading, that she hung her dough on the clothes line.

Up to the year 1839 no person living in southeastern Wisconsin had, as yet, legal title to his claim. People had entered and taken possession of government land not yet officially surveyed or open to sale. Yet such were the local laws formed and adhered to by the settlers that certain improvements constituted a claim. And when a settler conformed to the laws of a neighborhood or township, his claim was respected and protected until the land should come into the market. This first took place in March, 1839, and was known as the "great land sale".

Every dollar had been carefully hoarded for the eagerly looked for time when the hard-earned home should be at last secured.

At the sale, the rights of the settlers were carefully provided for and interested parties were present to see that speculators did not take advantage by bidding higher than the minimum price offered by the claimant, one person being promptly run out of town for attempting to do so. A person present at the sale (Mr. Otis Whitman) gave us some interesting information which we quote in full:-

"My father", said he, "was selected to bid in the land for claimants in this vicinity, at the government price of \$1.25 per acre. There was no overbidding as the claimants had previously organized to prevent it. George Smith, a capitalist from Scotland, came with money sufficient for all who needed it. Though his terms were exorbitant, there were many who had no money to pay for their lands and were glad to get it. His terms to begin with were 100%; a quarter section government price \$1.25 per acre would amount to \$200. This was doubled by Mr. Smith and placed at \$400, with 12% annually thereafter. Notwithstanding such high rates there were many of my acquaintances who took advantage of the opportunity.

"Alexander Mitchell was at that time Mr. Smith's secretary and book-keeper and many years after became Mr. Smith's successor in business. Both accumulated fortunes and were placed at the head of great corporations. They died worth many millions each. Mr. Smith's estimated wealth at the time of his death in London in 1900 was fifty million.

"I went to Milwaukee a short time after the land sales to pay Mr. Smith some money, and did so through Alexander Mitchell. His office was a small, cheaply built, one story building, surrounded by trees. The city--if there was one--was simply located in the timber.

"When I think of that city, as well as this, (Chicago) and the whole surrounding country, I am filled with wonder at the advancement and rapid growth since then."

The year 1839 saw the coming of several remembered people: Obed Hulburt, father of Hiland Hulburt, Eleazer Everitt, Jedediah Healy, Abial Whitman, Philo Beldon, Henry Cady and Richard Ela.

Obed Hulburt bought a farm lying between Rochester and Waterford on the west side of the river; also one of 160 acres lying along the east bank of the river south of the village now belonging to Emerson Ela. He built the house at the end of Water street on the northeast corner.

Concerning Mr. Eleazer Everitt, we quote from Judge Dyer in his address to the old settler's society in 1871

"Mr. Everitt purchased 240 acres at the land sales". (This was on the Vienna road west of Rochester). "Preparatory to the erection of a dwelling



he hauled two logs to mill and got them sawed into lumber. He hauled the lumber back to his farm, cut down some trees for corner posts, and with this material he built his shanty which constituted the first place for shelter and abode for himself, his wife and two children in the wild interior region where he was destined to build up a fine estate.

"The first season he broke up six acres upon which he sowed his first wheat, which produced a good crop. He sold his first load at Southport for thirteen dollars, and was paid for it in the currency of a bank which he afterward learned had failed two years before."

Abial Whitman kept a dry goods store on the southeast corner of Main and State streets. He bought his goods in Boston and got his supplies from there. He built the house at the southwest corner of State and Spring streets with which later are associated the names of Brown, Farr and Belden.

Philo Belden, soon after his arrival, rebuilt the sawmill on Muskego Creek. In connection with this, some years later, he operated an iron foundry. Mr. Belden owned the first brick chimney in Rochester. The bricks for it were brought from the mouth of Root river in Racine. He was president of the "Fox River Valley" railroad company, and held various positions of honor in the county and state. In 1885 he was elected county judge of Racine County, resigning on account of ill health shortly before his death in 1889.

Henry Cady at once built a home on State street, in block 13. Later for some years he owned and lived on the property known as "Cherry Hill" farm. When he returned to the village he took up his residence in the brick house next to his former home. He opened a drug store and was for many years postmaster. Mr. Cady was frequently called upon during his long life in Rochester, to serve in some position of public trust.

Richard E. Ela was an active manufacturer from the time of his arrival until 1871 when ill health compelled the closing of his business. In the first few months he built a small frame house, part of the present home, using the cellar for a shop. Here he began alone the making of fanning mills, peddling them himself the next season in the sparsely settled country round about. These were the first manufactured in the region. Soon after, he built a shop, a frame building standing directly across the river from his home.

His business rapidly increased from year to year, more extensive shops were built, a large stone structure replaced the first frame shop, many hands were employed and branch establishments located in other places. In later years he also manufactured wagons, carriages, safes and plows. The plow factory stood on the river a little north of the bridge.

In a letter written by a visitor in Rochester in 1854, we find that for several years he had taken medals for the best plows, fanning-mills and carriages made in Wisconsin, and that he found customers for his carriages in Milwaukee and Chicago.

Of Mr. Ela it has been said, "He left a legacy to the community rarely equalled. For fifty years he lived among them,--a man of large business capacity, an example of industry, of undoubted integrity, of noble principles and unblemished character".

In July of this year Rev. C. C. Cadwell was called to Rochester. He was the first resident minister. He built and occupied the house at the end of Water street on the south side, later owned by Mr. Brook Sheard.

Services were still held as before in various places until the next year when the west side school house was built. Meetings were then held there.

The Congregational society was organized with thirty members. Mr. Cadwell continued pastor until 1843, when Rev. Mr. Wells succeeded him.

Dr. Solomon Blood, the first physician to locate in Rochester, came in 1839. He built a dwelling on the west side Waterford road opposite the location of Godfrey's first camping place and a small building near by which he used for an office. Other early physicians were Drs. Bois, Nash, and Hill.

In the fall and winter of this year, the village was under quarantine for small-pox for many weeks; no one was allowed to enter or leave the place.

Mr. Godfrey contracted the disease on a trip to Geneva for flour, the nearest mill being located there. Others took the disease. It proved fatal in the case of Mrs. Godfrey. She died December 14, 1839, and was buried on the Wade farm beside her sister. She had faced and fought this dreadful disease with the same fine courage and faithfulness that had brought her to her frontier house. One of the few present at her burial says, "I shall never forget the sorrowful scene. It was a bleak, wintry day and snowing heavily. There were only three or four of us who went to the grave, walking beside the sled that bore her remains."

During the fall of 1839 and the spring of 1840, plats of two sections of the village were entered for record: one in October 1839, by Martin Whitman, Hiland Hulburt, Obed Hulburt, Levi Godfrey, Philo Belden, as "owners and proprietors" of the east side, south of Main street, and of the west side excepting the lots west of State and south of Main; the second in May 1840, which included the lots on the east side north of Main, by Elias Smith, Consider Heath, David Anderson, Amaziah Stebbins, Margaret Cox of Racine, a group of owners and proprietors whose names are not in later village annals. The Godfrey addition of 1845 included the remaining lots within village limits, those west of State, south of Main.

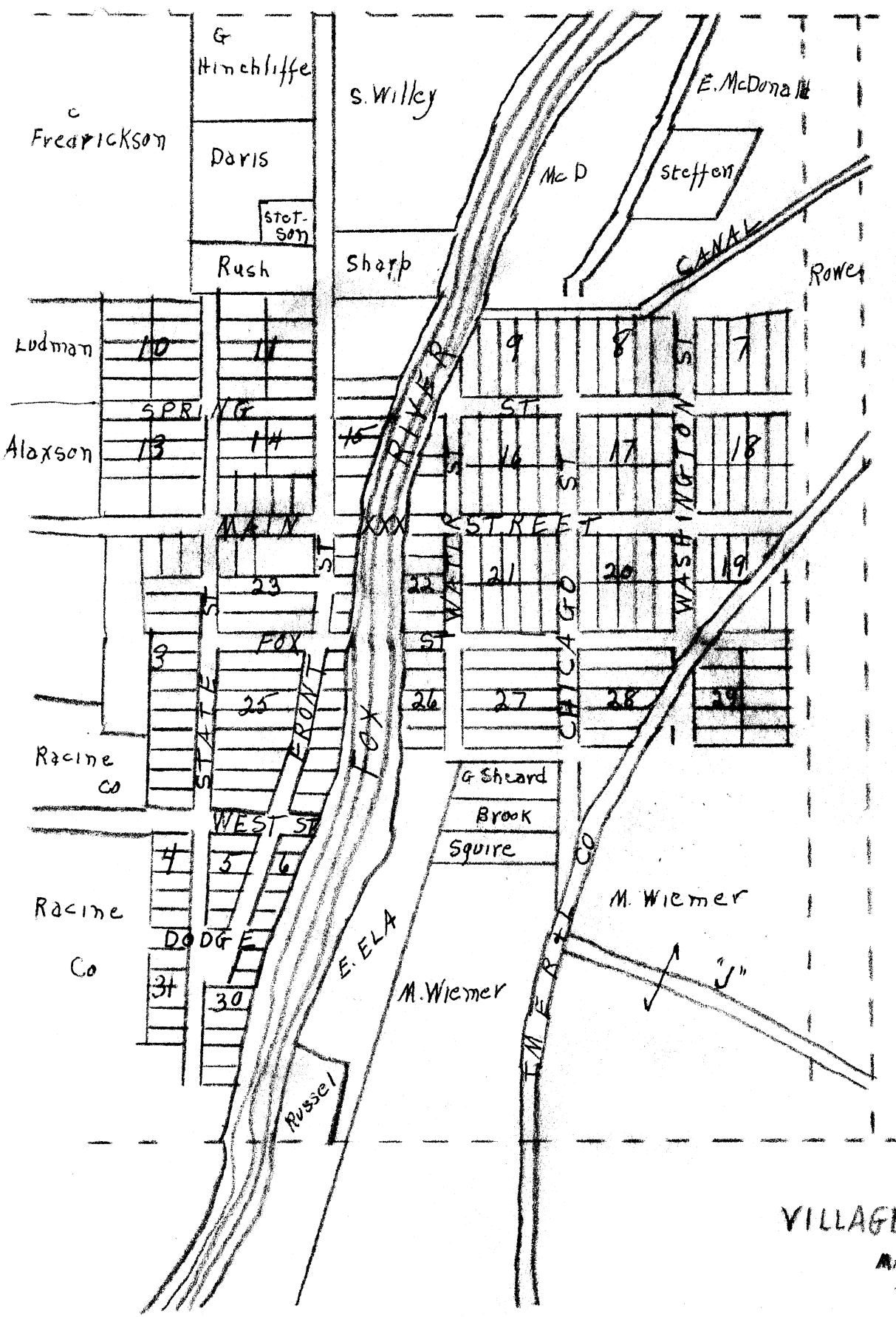
Among those who made settlement in 1840 were William S. Hoyt and son, F. E. Hoyt, who bought a farm west of the village on the Burlington road entering Rochester at State and West streets, the "Frank Hoyt Road". They occupied the home through life, and to the third generation, the ownership is continued.

Mr. Orlin Wright and family also came this year. They lived wherever they could find room until Mr. Wright built a frame house on the south side of Main street in block 20. Mr. Wright was a cabinet maker, and his trade was much needed in the village. He had a small shop on Muskego Creek near the sawmill, that he might take advantage of the water power for his lathe. His chairs, tables, and bedsteads were the first manufactured at any place within a distance of sixty miles west.

Mr. Wright has said that when they came they found a town of some two dozen houses, mostly of log. The frame houses that he remembered were Mr. Cady's, the new Godfrey hotel, a one story building nearly opposite, the store on the east side, then in process of construction, the Myers hotel, the Ela home, and a two story frame house on the river south of this.

To summarize further, the business places were three stores, a post-office, a sawmill, a cabinet shop, several carpenter shops, and a fanning mill shop. There were occasional church services, and a private school now and then. In the country about, numerous claims were showing steady improvement.

When Racine County was created, three townships were established within it. The western part was Rochester. It contained the three villages, Rochester, Waterford, and Burlington, and included the Townships of Dover,



VILLAGE of ROCHESTER  
MAY 1912.

Norway, Waterford, and the north part of Burlington. It was thus established by an Act of Legislature, January 2, 1838. An Act of March 1839, created Burlington, and gave Rochester a southern line one section north of its present southern boundary. Sections 13 to 18, now in Rochester, were a part of Burlington township. By this Act, there was left for Rochester the two northern rows of the present township of Dover, and the townships of Norway and Waterford. Norway became independent in 1847, Dover, in the early '50s, probably 1853. Waterford was established by the County Board November 12, 1852. By the same enactment sections numbered 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 were taken from Burlington on the north and made part of Rochester on the south, and Rochester was thereby established as a half township. Just why Burlington was assigned 42 sections instead of 36 and why the towns of range 19 in Racine and Kenosha counties are irregular the Acts of Legislature do not reveal.

Regarding the name, John Gregory, in "Southeastern Wisconsin", erroneously states that Philo Belden and the Hulburds chose the name Rochester, when they filed the original plat in 1839. As noted above, the name is recorded in the act of 1838. The coming of the Hulburds was later than this, and Mr. Belden, though credited with a temporary sojourn in 1837, did not come to live until 1839, and was from Connecticut. The name must have been chosen in the first two years. There is village tradition that the place was named for Rochester, N. Y., honoring associations of some of the earliest settlers. This tradition is endorsed in an article by an early surveyor, Joshua Hathaway, Esq. in Wis. Hist. Coll. Vol. 1. He gives also an account of his own attempt to name it otherwise. He says that he inscribed the name Waukeeshah upon an oak tree "standing where the town of Rochester now stands, in Racine County. The name was selected with the consent of Messrs. Cox and Myers, all being interested in the location as a name for the future town and so it appears on the earliest sectional maps of those times. When the town began to be settled, shortly after, the name was changed by the inhabitants to Rochester, because, like Rochester, N. Y. it had water power, no other resemblance being tracable." He says that he obtained the name Waukeeshah from the Indians, understanding it to be the Pottowatomie for "Fox".

The years reviewed and the early forties were the real pioneer years. And let us here consider what this meant.

Without means of ready communication with other parts of the country, and with scanty supplies of food, clothing, and proper tools, the difficulties in building, and tilling the soil, seemed almost insuperable at times.

The rough, mud-chinked log cabins, which were at first their only homes, with their stone or clay fireplaces, and their puncheoned or hard earth floors, represented much hard labor, but did not always keep out the snows and cold of winter. These early residents had to contend with thieving Indians, and hungry, thieving wolves.

One of the old settlers tells of being awakened one moonlight night by a wolf investigating his stock of provisions. "We looked at each other", said he, "but neither of us said anything, and the wolf took a bone that suited him and left."

Systematized hunts soon made wolves less troublesome. But Indians remained for many years. They camped near the village in large numbers during the fishing seasons, begging, drinking, quarreling and selling their game, when not engaged in fishing, but they were generally peaceful toward the white people.

A favorite camping ground was at the forks, near Muskego bridge; another south of the village on the east river bank. These Indians belonged to the tribe of rice eaters, and until the late fifties came down the river in canoes every fall to gather the wild rice that grew in abundance along the shores.

A lady in recalling these Indian visits relates:--"I was at work in an upper room one day, when hearing unusual sounds below I looked down through the opening where the ladder was placed and saw the house was full of Indians. Very much frightened, I hurried down the ladder to learn if possible, what they wanted. One old savage with a hideously painted face, after vainly trying to make himself understood, suddenly gave a jerk to a well-filled bag he carried, and dumped a lot of dirty, squirming fish on my kitchen floor. My husband entering just then and comprehending the situation, bought some fish and got them away."

The Chapman house, corner of Jefferson and Main streets at Waterford was on the site of an old Indian Council House, called "Cadney's Castle" by the white people. All around it were Indian corn fields. An important trail to Chicago, led over what is known as "Belden's Hill", and was followed by the early settlers in their trip to the from that city. Traces of others are still to be found.

Miss Emma Drake, who became Mrs. Wm. Rowe, was one of a family who came in these years. As a girl she came to singing school in Rochester in a cart with wheels which had been made out of a log and was driven by oxen. Deer, wolves and many Indians abounded. When the Drakes came from England, they brought dishes, furniture and a stove. Neighbors who were having J. I. Case as a guest, made a custard pie and brought it over for Mrs. Drake to bake in her stove--the only one in the county.

Little furniture could be brought by the pioneers and their ingenuity was taxed to devise necessary articles. Rough tables were readily constructed and benches and boxes used for chairs.

The country was a pleasant combination of small prairies and groves of timber--the beautiful oak openings before referred to.

Early settlers were glad to locate in or near timber land, as it now only afforded them convenient fuel, and building material, but was a protection in a measure, against prairie fires. Though these might pass through the timber it was not with the same devastating force. Such fires it is thought, accounted for the notable absence of under brush the white man found here. Mr. Joseph Hackson told of going often to "Belden's Hill" when a boy, for the magnificent distance of view through these oak openings, and the profusion and variety of flowers to be found. From there also, he often watched the prairie fires reddening the horizon in many directions.

Early farming was limited to patches of corn, potatoes, turnips, etc. Rutabagas were a staple crop, the seed having been brought by Mr. Chapman in 1836.

Mr. Archibald Cooper has said that for fourteen days while clearing lumber, rutabagas and salt was his only diet. He "had them warmed for breakfast and supper, but ate them frozen for dinner."

Game and fish were always to be had, so there was no actual starving time, though rations were often at low ebb.

Persons after working hard all day, would often hunt and fish by torchlight.

Generally the first year's crop would fall far short of supplying necessary food, and the small stores each settler brought with him were exhausted and not easily replaced.

The nearest place to secure supplies was Chicago, some seventy miles away, which was then a town of two or three thousand inhabitants. At certain seasons, several men with their ox-teams would be delegated to make the trip for the settlement. They went in company, because of the many deep sloughs on the marshy prairies. Each loaded wagon required the combined yokes of oxen to pull it through. It took many days to make these trips, and the returns were eagerly awaited.

A group of young men once had hard luck in the purchase of beef. Rumor was that several miles away on the "United States Road", as the government road was called, a man was about to kill a beef. As this was a rare opportunity, they hastened to send one of their number to see if it were really true, and if so, to get what he could. To their unbounded delight he returned with half a beef. They then discovered they had nothing to keep it in. After discussing ways and means, they felled an oak, hollowed out the trunk, and triumphantly salted and packed their beef therein. Alas, for the plans that "gang-a-gley"! The sap oozed from the green oak trough, and their cherished beef became tanned "as black as boot leather and as tough"--to quote from one of the unfortunates.

Even with good crops of grain, there was much difficulty in preparing it for food. Mills being so distant, various home devices were resorted to. Mr. Archibald Cooper said that for the first johnny-cake he ate, he ground the corn in a coffee mill. They ate with it, molasses made of watermelon juice boiled down.

Some of the finest pioneer stories, however, and the most deserving of remembrance, are told of Israel Markham, who came from Michigan in the late thirties, and took a claim north of Waterford.

He was a man of greater means than the majority of early settlers and came abundantly supplied and well fitted out. It was he who brought the first span of horses into the country.

During an unusually long, hard winter he hears of two or three families suffering from actual want. He took them to his own home and shared with them through the winter. One of these families lived in this town. He found the man and his wife in great destitution, the woman sick. Placing her on his horse, he walked with the husband back through the deep snow, leading the cow. Later, in the forties, many Norwegians were sick with fever and ague in their settlement to the north. They were new-comers and were having a discouraging time. Mr. Markham had on his place a log hut for a blacksmith shop, with a large fireplace at one end. On learning of these unfortunates, he immediately fitted up the shop with comfortable bunks on each side and brought to this small hospital, eight of the worst cases, caring for them until their recovery.

These stories bring us closer to the lives of these brave hearted pioneers, and give us a glimpse of the pluck and energy required and the hardships endured.

In 1839 and '40 there was much discussion concerning the establishment of roads. About this time too, Congress appropriated \$10,000 for opening up a road from Racine to Janesville. This government road was long known as the "United States Road". It was constructed under the supervision of Capt. Thomas Cram, of the U.S. Topographical engineers. This was to give an outlet to the markets for the great Rock River wheat country. It ran directly through Rochester, and became the great thoroughfare of southeastern Wisconsin. Not only was this road an outlet for produce from the Rock river country, it became also a lane of transportation for the lead regions of southwestern Wisconsin. We are told that much smelted lead was shipped from Racine, all passing through here. Each apparently small load was drawn by three yoke of oxen.

A foundry for the making of lead pipes stood on Main street, at the foot of the hill east of the village. Mr. Van Court, the owner, purchased all of the lead used, from those passing through from the lead mines. The pipe was made in a primitive way, the machinery operated by horsepower.

In 1840 the school building in district No. 1 was erected. This was the first built especially for that purpose in the village. It was

where the present one stands. But it was a small, one-story building, facing the west, the government road passing in front of it. Mr. Taggart, who had been teaching in the log house, was the first teacher here.

In 1842, many English people arrived. Some were directly from England; others, relatives, joined them in the eastern states where they had first settled. While some remained in the village, others bought farms to the southeast, forming what is known as the English Settlement.

Mr. Joseph Jackson, with parents and brother, came this year from Poughkeepsie, N. Y. His father was a shoemaker and expected to locate at Racine. Finding things over-crowded there, and hearing of the thriving village of Rochester to the west, he with his father, drove over, and, pleased with the prospects both for the village and themselves, concluded to locate there. They opened a shoe store and through the prosperous years of the town, were highly successful. George, Abram, and William Jackson, brothers of Mr. Joseph Jackson, later became prominent merchants.

Mr. Jackson told how, boy-like, his mind had been filled with the Indians and wild animals he should encounter in the wilds of the west, and how totally different the journey in reality proved; how inexpressibly beautiful the country seemed to him, down the Hudson, through the canal, across the lakes, and finally through the blooming prairies and imposing timberland.

Many business men came in the forties--hardware and dry goods merchants, grocers, harness-makers, tailors and cabinet-makers. Hackney, Creviston, Ackeril, Adams, and True are familiar business names of those days.

It was in 1843 that the first grist mill was built by Messrs. Belden, Ford, and Green. It stood on the site of the old mill, just back of the new one built by Mr. Russell. Its cost was \$13,000. This was sold in 1846 to Messrs. Hoagland and Hulburd. In 1850, they in turn sold to James and Robert Scott. This mill was burned in 1858, but was soon rebuilt by the Scotts. In 1864 the property was purchased by A. J. Russell and James Jones, and four years later Mr. Jones sold his interest to Mr. Andrew Russell, who in 1884 built a fine new mill with modern equipment.

In 1843, Mr. Peter Campbell bought the frame hotel of Mr. Godfrey, erecting in front of it the present brick hotel. Later the frame part was removed and the long, stone wing added.

In 1842 and 1843 there was often seen in the village and the country about, a person by the name of Jerome Case. This enterprising young man, before starting for the west, purchased six threshing machines, which he brought with him. Reaching Racine, he sold all but one, with which he started through the country threshing, managing the machine himself. "Up to this time", it is said, "invention had only succeeded in making what was called an open thresher, requiring an after-process of winnowing to separate the grain from the chaff." Mr. Case was constantly devising improvements, and in the winter of 1843-44 succeeded in making a thresher and separator combined, after a model of his own invention. This was made in the small house that stood on the southeast corner of Main and State streets, which was occupied by Mr. Seth Warner, with whom the young man boarded. A man by the name of Stephen Thresher also boarded there, who, at this time had partly built a house in block 3 on State street. This was enclosed and was used through the winter by Mr. Thresher as a carpenter shop.

The parts of the first machine were made by Mr. Thresher in his shop, under the direction of Mr. Case. It was set up and given its first trial in Mr. Cady's barn. Mr. Thresher's house in its ninety-third year, is still one of the desirable homes of the village. With a few changes, the machine was an acknowledged success. It was considered a marvelous



achievement. Through the manufacture of these machines at Racine, Mr. J. I. Case made a fortune.

About this time, too, there lived in Rochester a young man who later won for himself an enviable reputation throughout the state, Mr. William E. Smith of the firm of "Smith and Crossman". Their store was the brick structure long owned by George Black. The Crossmans lived in the rooms above, Mr. Smith boarding with them. One well acquainted with him here, speaks of him as a man of exemplary habits, conscientious, honest, "one whose word was as good as his bond." From here, he went to Fox Lake, Wisconsin. It was through his efforts the young ladies' seminary of that place was organized. He was an early member of the state assembly, later, State Senator, and from 1878 to 1882, Governor of the state. He held many other very responsible positions.

In 1845, during the pastorate of Mr. Wells, the building of the Congregational church was begun, Mr. Obed Hulburt donated the land, on the northwest corner of State and Spring streets. The cost of the church was about \$2,000. It was not completed until 1848. At that time Rev. R. R. Snow was its pastor, and the membership had increased since first organized, from thirty to fifty-seven.

Other pastors of early times were Doolittle, Davis, Stevens, Barteau, C. Clapp and Anderson.

In 1846 Rochester cemetery was incorporated. Part of the present grounds west of the village had been purchased in 1841, of Mr. Seth Warner. In 1842 it was surveyed. From that year, interments had taken place there, the first being that of Miss Sarah Godfrey, daughter of Mr. Levi Godfrey; other members of the family buried on the Wade farm were removed to this place. In 1885, Mr. R. E. Ela added to the cemetery grounds to the north and west.

About 1848, traffic having become so heavy and roads at seasons being so very bad, parties conceived the idea of building plank roads connecting important points, and stock companies were formed for the purpose. The one passing through Rochester, known as "The Racine and Rock Rover Plank Road Co." was incorporated by an act of the legislature, March 6, 1848. Among the twenty Commissioners of the road, names familiar to us are those of Hiland Hulburt, and Philo Belden of Rochester, Nelson, Norton of Burlington, Samuel C. Russ of Waterford, Gilbert Knapp and Sidney Sage of Racine.

To hold the charter the road was to be commenced within the following two years, and within five years finished and put into operation as far as Fox river. It was to be at least three rods wide, securely constructed, and a smooth and permanent road maintained. Toll Gates could be placed not less than three miles apart. Toll rates could not exceed  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cents per mile for vehicles drawn by two animals. Every vehicle drawn by one animal, one cent per mile. Every horse and rider, or led horse, three-fourths cent per mile. Every twenty sheep or swine, and every 20 head of cattle, one cent per mile.

The total cost from Racine to Rochester was nearly \$50,000 and the subscribers to stock between Racine and Rochester mortgaged their farms at 12% for five years; about \$15,000 was raised in the east upon these mortgages; \$10,000 was raised upon city bonds. A Director wrote in 1848 to one of the promoters in Rochester: "The remaining \$25,000 must be raised from the stockholders of Racine and Rochester. I am much pleased with your list of subscribers and I tell the Directors that there is a moral certainty that nearly all the stock subscribed for in Rochester will be paid by the first of September."

Generous dividends were paid in the first years, varying from 12% to 7%, but with the establishment of railroads through southeastern Wisconsin, the value of the stock declined; in 1854, it was estimated as 30%, or less. In 1857



In 1857, the Board of Directors notified the Supervisors of Rochester that they had abandoned the road within the town, and were no longer responsible for its condition.

As we have seen, two great highways connected Racine and Janesville, running nearly parallel and occasionally uniting, the plank road lying mostly to the south of the government road. They joined about a mile east of the village, were identical through Main street, and at the corner of Main and State streets diverged again, the plank road continuing to the marshes and hills west of town, where it turned southwest, to the Vienna road. The government road turned to the right over the hill, past the old Congregational church, thence northwest, curving around the marshes and hills to what is now known as the Honey Creek road.

It cannot be said that the plank road increased traffic, but it added greatly to its convenience during the eight years it was maintained. Long before its coming, hotels had sprung up every few miles along the government road to meet the public need. The Union House and Meyer's Hotel of Rochester were frequently so over-flowing with guests that the travelers were obliged to move further on for lodging for themselves and teams. And long since, the weekly mail, conveyed by lone horseman, had given way to the daily mail from each direction, conveyed, with passengers, by "coach and four".

A business man of those days said he had often seen as many as a hundred teams pass through the town in the early morning. It was no uncommon sight to see forty or fifty loads pass through together.

During those thriving years, Mr. Godfrey, ever alert to an opportunity, and to the interests of the town, began another hotel, which later became the Academy building. This was on a still more ambitious scale, and for some years stood unfinished because of lack of means. Then the incoming railroad of that time hastened its completion, but it again stood useless on the bursting of that famous bubble.

Later it was used for private schools by Prof. McGauffin, Miss Luella Clark and Mr. Chamberlain, Prof. Colt, and Mrs. Waller, successively. In 1867, it was purchased by the Free-will Baptists denomination who organized a seminary. In 1894 it passed into the hands of the Congregationalists who established an Academy.

In 1848, the school house in District No. 2 was built. The first to teach there was Miss Emerson, who coming from away, "boarded around", as the custom was. The east side district had been established before this, school in the meantime being held in a brick or stone building that stood on the lot east of the blacksmith shop, on the north side of Main street.

Miss Sarah Whitman, who became Mrs. Cady, taught there, being the first teacher in the new district. In 1892 the two public schools were combined, and the old schoolhouse of 1848 was moved to the west side, to serve as the town hall of 1894 on Main street.

In 1849 and through the fifties, the California gold excitement carried many from Rochester across the Great Plains. The first two companies from here, numbering eleven, journeyed together, joining a larger number of gold seekers at Council Bluffs. Among them were Mr. Merrill Farr, Mr. Wm. Hoyt, Mr. Sharp, and Mr. Wm. Jackson. Their route was by the General Freemont Trail, and they were six months on the way. They had to carry supplies, depending largely on hard-tack. When in camp, they cooked game, and baked bread. Throughout that six months they kept

the bread going by saving a fresh piece of dough from each baking to set the new batch with. Mr. Wm. Rowe went in 1852, and left an interesting account of the journey.

Many followed in succeeding years. Some never returned, finding homes in the western land, or graves in the desert or sea. One who went by the Isthmus of Panama in 1858, sailed in the "Star of the West", the boat afterward fired upon at Fort Sumpter.

In 1852 or '53, immigrants from Bohemia came. They were from Prague, brought from the old country where a man's wages were ten cents a day and board, by the hope of a fairer chance to live. Their ambition was small maintenance holdings of land and in this they were successful, acquiring individual three-acre tracts in the eastern part of the village. They proved industrious, thrifty citizens, and descendants continue their holdings after three-quarters of a century.

Germans, Danes and Hollanders who have settled in Rochester through the years, have come by families rather than groups. Norwegians, Swiss and Irish have been represented by individuals or families. The reasons for leaving the homeland and the account of the long journey to this small interior village would make an interesting story. There are residents whose parents left Bohemia because of compulsory military service, and others came from Denmark for the same reason. There are Germans who came with the hope of doing better in their trades. One Englishman who came about 1850, was influenced by propaganda. This was Mr. Wm. Turner, who heard a lecture on Wisconsin in England. He had entertained the idea of going to Australia. He was very fond of hunting, however, and this lecture pictured Wisconsin as a wonderful hunting region. He changed his plan, emigrated to America and came directly to Wisconsin, and after a few years to Rochester.

On our country's call to preserve the union, Rochester gave ready and generous response. Fourteen lie buried in our cemetery or on southern battlefields.

In our cemetery, also, lie two soldiers of the War of 1812, Israel Markham and James Saxton; a soldier of the Battle of Waterloo, Mr. Wm. Turner; and one who witnessed the "Charge of the Light Brigade" in the Battle of Balaklava in 1854, Mr. George Waller.

With the incoming of the railways in southeastern Wisconsin, in the 50's, came the decline of Rochester as a promising business center. For many years it was one of the most important points west of Racine. The first railroad through this section to the Mississippi, the "Racine, Janesville and Mississippi"--later the "Western Union", as a matter of course, was to pass through Rochester and Janesville. Janesville, feeling sure of the road, was negligent in subscribing the required amount of stock, and while she loitered, Beloit saw her opportunity and secured the road, which carried it six miles to the south of Rochester. At the time, this was not so deeply regretted by the majority of her citizens, because of the almost positive assurance of the "Fox River Valley" road which had been in prospect for some years. This road was to open up to soft coal fields of Illinois, and was to run from Richmond, Illinois, to Milwaukee, later connecting with Chicago. Running north and south, it would not conflict with other interests. The road was graded nearly throughout its course, when it was abandoned for lack of funds.

Rochester in the past, has numbered as hers, men and women of whom she justly may be proud; and while of the thousands she has sheltered, but few remain, we believe there is still in the hearts of her present citizens, much strength of purpose and quiet energy, working along the lines left for her to develop.