

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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VOL. XXV

JULY, 1963

No. 3

## Rochester's Ethnic Transformations

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

Several dramatic ethnic transformations have marked the course of Rochester's history. Each succeeding generation has had a distinctly different character. The pioneer settlers were composed chiefly of Yankees, Yorkers, and Southerners, with a generous sprinkling of Negroes, but the town soon attracted migrants from Ireland and other parts of the British Empire and from western and northern Europe. By 1845, when the first census of the foreign-born was taken, 30 per cent of the city's 25,000 residents were from these distant lands. Their number mounted rapidly in subsequent decades and acquired greater diversity, but the increasing host of their American-born offspring swelled the ranks of the native-born, checking the upsurge of the immigrant ratio in 1855 at 44 per cent.

By 1870, despite a mounting influx from southern and eastern Europe, the percentage of the foreign-born had begun to decline. Yet their number, plus that of the offspring of foreign parents—the foreign stock as it was described in the census—increased until it slightly exceeded 70 per cent by 1890 and hovered around that figure until the First World War. Both the total number and the per cent of the foreign-born and their offspring have declined sharply since 1920, but Rochester's cos-

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mopolitan character was firmly established by that date. And although a new influx from the South and from Puerto Rico has not been large enough to maintain the ethnic diversity of a half-century ago, it has contributed a distinctive new character to the Rochester population.

### **Early Immigrant Strands**

Although a few migrants from Britain, Ireland, and Germany appeared among the early Rochester settlers, it was not until the building and opening of the canal in the 1820's that they began to increase sufficiently in number to attract attention. Even then, except for the arrival of an occasional boat load comprised exclusively of one nationality, as when Lars Larson brought his party of 50 Norwegians to Rochester in the fall of 1825, the migration was seldom noted for it was already characteristic of the American scene.

The early censuses did not number the foreign-born, though they tabulated aliens who were not yet naturalized, of whom Rochester had 1261 in 1830. The state census of 1845 found almost 4000 such aliens in the city, well over half the 7468 residents born abroad. Most of these newcomers were from Britain and her possessions, but 1316 hailed from Germany, 148 from France, and there were 182 "others." Some doubt concerning the accuracy of these first figures was raised by the federal census of 1850. It found only 6329 foreign-born in Rochester, but tabulated another 5807 as American-born children of foreign parents. Whether or not some of the children had been counted with the foreign-born in 1845, the state census a decade later recorded a rapid jump in their number to 19,389 or 44 per cent of the total—and this at a time when Rochester's growth, in the eyes of many old residents, was stagnant.

Despite the uncertain character of its early statistics, Roch-

ester quickly became aware of the presence of many residents from distant lands. Like the first settlers of a few years before, they hastened to establish churches and schools and to form active ethnic societies. St. Patrick's Catholic Church, organized in 1820, and a Hibernian Society, five years later, marked the institutional beginnings of the Irish who already had a thriving settlement east of the river known as Dublin. Early newcomers from Britain found a welcome at St. Luke's Episcopal or if they were Scottish at First Presbyterian. Some from Scotland joined with their fellow countrymen in nearby Caledonia in staging a celebration in December 1831 that engendered so much enthusiasm that it was repeated annually for many years. From it grew a local chapter of the St. Andrew's Society. The English, less conscious of their separateness, engaged in occasional games of cricket in 1847 and after, but they did not form a St. George Society for another two years.

In contrast the Germans, partially because of the language difficulty, actively promoted a variety of organizations. In 1832 they established a United Evangelical Lutheran Church and organized a local militia company under German-speaking officers. In the forties they opened two Catholic and four new Protestant chapels, and in 1851 they organized a street band, a choral group, and a Turner Society. The German Jews organized a synagogue in 1848, the same year that another ethnic group, hailing mostly from Canada, established a French Catholic chapel, which later became Our Lady of Victory Church. The appearance of a Dutch Reformed Church in 1852 marked the emergence of still another foreign-language group.

Although a friendly welcome was generally accorded most newcomers on their first arrival, the problem of adjustment mounted as their numbers increased. In December 1840 the Christmas celebration at the German Lutheran Church attracted

wide interest because of the lighted tree it introduced, and many families later adopted the practice. Friction developed within a few years, however, bursting forth when the German band marched past a tavern patronized by the Irish or by a group of Yankees. Doctrinal controversies, often precipitated by foreign-trained clergymen, rent several local churches in the 1850's, and rival efforts to proselytize the uncommitted newcomers pitted one denomination against another and accentuated the division between Protestants and Catholics. Since most of the 3000 newly naturalized voters had joined the Democratic party, frustrating the Whigs in successive local elections, a faction of that body organized the American or Know Nothing party in 1854 and proceeded to capture control of the city. Yet Maltby Strong, who became its mayor, followed a conciliatory course, and the issue of nativism was soon forgotten amidst the rising clamor over the question of slavery.

Enterprising newcomers from abroad were bringing new vitality to Rochester at the mid-century. Some established new industrial specialties—the nurseries of George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry, and the instrument shops of George Taylor, John Jacob Bausch, and William Gleason. Others brought new skills to build up the shoe and clothing industries, and one young Englishman even broke into the old flour milling hierarchy. A German daily invaded the newspaper field in 1851. But the banks remained securely in Yankee hands until after the Civil War.

It was the ordeal of battle that tried the mettle and proved the loyalty of the foreign-born to their adopted city and country. Each successive regiment that left Rochester from 1861 until 1865 had its contingent of Irish and British recruits, and at least two full companies of Germans under German-speaking officers responded to Lincoln's call. Men of varied back-

grounds rubbed shoulders in army camps, and ethnic distinctions lost their meaning as the crisis deepened. When the 140th New York State Volunteers, most of them from Rochester, charged up the side of Little Round Top in time to hold that key position in the Battle of Gettysburg, Col. Patrick O'Rourke and 27 of his men paid the supreme sacrifice. His heroic action not only contributed to the Union victory that day, but also helped to forge a new unity in Rochester, where citizens of all backgrounds and all faiths joined in the ceremony conducted in his honor at St. Bridget's Catholic Church.

The Civil War also saw the Negroes of Rochester eager to battle for the freedom of their brothers in the South. Frederick Douglass emerged as the leader of his people, and when, at his urging, Lincoln moved to enlist Negroes as soldiers, Douglass recruited a company in the Rochester area. Whether because of his zeal as a recruiter or because of a halt to migration from the South, Rochester's Negro population dropped to 429 by 1865, a decline matched but not equalled by that in the number of the foreign-born, who for the first time saw a reduction in their ranks. In the latter case, however, the end of hostilities brought a surge of new arrivals who swelled the total of the foreign-born to 21,184 by 1870, slightly more than a third of the city's population.

### **The Cosmopolitan Years**

In Rochester as in most American cities north of the Mason and Dixon line, the decades after the Civil War were increasingly cosmopolitan in spirit. The number of new immigrants who settled in Rochester each year mounted fairly steadily during the seventies and eighties, yet the number of their offspring mounted more rapidly, causing the percentage of the foreign-born to drop slightly. But in the nineties, when the number as

well as the per cent of newcomers began to drop off, the foreign-born and their children together comprised over two thirds of the city's population. They maintained that ratio until, at the turn of the century, the swelling ranks of the grandchildren of the early immigrants tipped the balance in favor of natives of native parents. Even then and for another decade or so the foreign-born and their children predominated among adults and maintained a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

More important than the mounting number of the foreign-born in the middle decades was the increased diversity of their origins and character. The Germans, who took first place from the Irish in 1865 and held it for the next half-century, comprised over a third of the foreign-born total until the early 1900's, but already in the eighties the number of eastern Europeans was mounting. These people, Poles, Jews, and Lithuanians, with the Italians who arrived in great numbers after the turn of the century, outnumbered the Germans by 1905 and brought new institutions and customs to Rochester. Migrants continued to come from England, Scotland, and especially Canada, and in smaller numbers from Holland, France, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries. The Near and the Far East each supplied a score or more, while a few also hailed from Africa or South America.

These newcomers contributed generously to all aspects of the city's life. Economically they brought not only a variety of skills to maintain and sometimes to elevate the standards of Rochester's earlier industries, notably in the clothing and optical fields, but also a number of new specialties such as brewing and food processing as well as cigar making. Culturally they not only brought strange new religious customs and churches, notably the Orthodox synagogues of the Jews and the Orthodox churches of other eastern Europeans, but also new tastes and

traditions in art and music and at least among the Jews a new zest for learning. Socially they brought customs and patterns of behavior that gave a more animated and dramatic tempo to Rochester society.

As the contributions of the foreign-born in the economic field became more apparent, a few of their leaders achieved positions of power in the community. George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry, the nurserymen, had assumed additional responsibilities when in the early sixties they backed the city's first horsecar company; recognition came in 1870 when the Flour City Bank elected them as trustees. And when three years later, the depression hit Rochester other local banks hastened to name as trustees one or more of the successful immigrant leaders, such as Louis Ernst, Michael Filon, and James Vick, while J. J. Bausch and Frederick Cook took the lead in organizing a strong German bank.

In the political field both the Irish and the Germans early played active roles at the ward level; many served as aldermen or supervisors from predominantly immigrant districts. John Lutes was in 1870 the first Rochester mayor of German birth, and Cornelius R. Parsons, who served from 1876 until 1890, was the first of English birth. William Carroll, who triumphed at the latter date, based his appeal on his Irish birth. Ethnic ties were politically important since five eighths of the 16,000 foreign-born males over 21 in Rochester that year were naturalized and slightly exceeded the number of native voters who had native parents, while the native voters who had foreign parents comprised another third of the total.

As the number and diversity of the foreign-born increased, their associations multiplied. Almost every ethnic group had its churches, its burial and benefit societies, its choral and dramatic clubs, its athletic and fraternal associations, even in some cases

separate locals in the labor unions. Bishop McQuaid, American-born of Irish parents, believed that all Catholics should worship in neighborhood parish churches on an integrated basis, but he encouraged the formation of ethnic societies within them and permitted the organization of leagues of such societies. By the eighties several of the immigrant groups felt secure enough to assume responsibility for the welfare of their own newcomers. The German-American Society, organized in 1883, and an independent German Jewish group, formed that same year, were the first. Each engaged an agent to meet the immigrant trains and assist newcomers in finding a home; each also sponsored courses in English to speed their adjustment. By the late nineties other ethnic groups were ready to take up this work.

Still another characteristic response made in time by all ethnic groups was the effort to preserve old-country traditions. The Irish before and after the Civil War, by their support successively of the Free Ireland movement, the Fenian societies, the Irish National Land League, and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, developed a consciousness of their Irish heritage that was not matched by other local minorities until the rebirth of the German Empire in the 1870's stirred a resurgence of nationalism within some of the German societies. The Scottish clans, the Swiss and Dutch dramatic societies, and several choral groups, all reflected a renewal of self-consciousness among the foreign-born and displayed an eagerness to win American respect and acceptance of their cultural offerings.

These developments, first evident among the earlier immigrant groups, spread among the Italians, the Poles, the Ukrainians, and other foreign-born newcomers after the turn of the century. Even Bishop McQuaid in his last years conceded the merit of permitting the Italians to establish separate churches to serve neighborhoods they dominated, and other ethnic groups

soon won that privilege. Among a plethora of Italian societies, an Italian Cultural Club made its appearance, while a Polish arts society and a Ukrainian chorus endeavored to alert their fellow countrymen to the charms and values of their native traditions. These were by no means the most popular societies, for the great majority of the immigrant newcomers from whatever source were peasants or persons of a lower-middle class origin whose contact with the high culture of the homeland had been slight. They took more pleasure in the annual picnics in summertime and in the social gatherings that commemorated national anniversaries, for it was especially at these events that their strapping sons and comely daughters could be persuaded to don the costumes of their forebears and dance to old-country tunes.

Unfortunately these joyous and sometimes boisterous occasions often seemed but brief interludes in the somber if not tragic lives of many immigrants. Coming to a strange land, in most cases without a speaking knowledge of English and often illiterate even in their native tongues, the immigrants generally had to find jobs in unskilled and poorly paid fields. The census of occupations in 1870 listed more common laborers, draymen, and masons among the German and Irish residents than among the native-born, while the latter predominated in the more desirable occupations. This situation persisted in later censuses and became intensified among the newer immigrants; moreover the development of sweat-shop conditions in some skilled trades, such as the clothing industry, further darkened the lives of many immigrant families. Indeed, as the number of newcomers increased, the pressure for adequate accommodations was intensified, and many crowded in with their relatives or boarded with fellow countrymen, hastening the deterioration of the immigrant quarters.

## Humanitarian Responses

Yet appalling as the conditions in some immigrant districts often were, the prevailing spirit was one of hopeful optimism. Seldom were the facilities as deficient or the restraints as baffling as in the old country. When overcrowding frequently became intensified, it was accepted as a temporary expedient to permit more newcomers to enjoy the opportunities of America. The great majority were in fact bettering their lot, and most of the hardships seemed endurable in view of their hopes and expectations. Muffled cries of protest sometimes arose in periods of depression, when the fate of the weak and the poor was most pitiful, but a variety of civic and philanthropic efforts generally helped to alleviate the situation before it became critical. Yet it was the increasing capacity and the mounting contributions of the foreign-born and their offspring that not only surmounted each generation's immigrant problems but also brought new vitality to Rochester. And gradually the city at large awoke to a fuller appreciation of its cosmopolitan character and culture.

Rochester's awareness of the special problems confronted by its foreign-born residents found increased expression in the mid-nineties. Many immigrant groups had developed their own benefit and self-help societies before the depression of 1893 struck, but they were no more prepared to cope with such a crisis than were the community-wide charities. Although few of the latter had previously taken special note of the ethnic diversity of their clients, they could no longer mistake the foreign accents in which cries for relief were voiced. The People's Rescue Mission kept a record of the national origins of its lodgers in January 1894 and discovered that, of the 644 men sheltered during the month, almost two thirds were born abroad, 151 in Ireland, 87 in Germany, 61 in England, 41 in

Canada, and 55 in six other countries. A survey of the applicants for relief that winter also disclosed a heavy representation of immigrants, whose total lack of resources struck the *Times* reporter who made the survey as most pathetic.

A number of forthright efforts to meet the challenge soon appeared. It was early in 1893, after reading a news account of how an unidentified immigrant woman, who had fainted in the street, had been lodged overnight in a police cell, that Susan B. Anthony hastened to establish the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. Among the many services it launched to safeguard women in the city, one, known as the Far and Near Club, was especially designed to make immigrant women feel at home. When a rumor spread that Italian women were not welcome, the organization, led by Mrs. Helen Barrett Montgomery, promptly denied the charge, citing a special class in English for Italian women. In fact its instructor, an active member of the Union, Miss C. R. Cutler, had five years before launched such a class for Italian men at the Rescue Mission where it continued to meet one night a week. Still another organization, the Y. W. C. A., engaged a woman able to speak several languages to meet the immigrant trains and help guide women traveling alone to their proper destinations.

Not all responses were so cordial. A nation-wide debate over the possible restriction of immigration in 1891 prompted the *Post Express* to interview a half-dozen leading citizens on the subject. Congressman-elect Greenleaf favored restriction of "criminals, paupers and all others in too great numbers," but not a total ban on immigration. David Hays and Rabbi Max Landsberg opposed any new restrictions; Robert Matthews and President David B. Hill of the University saw the need for some barriers against an influx of Chinese and others who could not be assimilated. Dr. E. V. Stoddard was more positive in

expressing that view, but the Rev. Asa Saxe, recalling that "We are all immigrants if we go back far enough," urged that reliance be placed not on barriers but on training in citizenship. Few in Rochester had given much thought to the subject at that date, but six years later, after many months of hard times, a number of citizens were ready to join a local chapter of the American Protective Association, a secret organization, which sought among other goals a complete halt on immigration.

The harsh circumstances that prompted restrictionist moves also gave rise to extreme views among the immigrants. Thus the Labor Lyceum, a Sunday afternoon discussion group started by workingmen in 1896, fell increasingly into the hands of the socialists and other foreign-born radicals. Yet when the Rev. William T. Brown endorsed this extreme position at the Lyceum in 1898 and endeavored to transform old Plymouth Congregational Church into a workingman's club, he soon found his supporters drifting away as the economy began to right itself. Walter Rauschenbusch, who also addressed the Lyceum on several occasions, urging a more gradual approach than that of revolutionary socialism, became the leading local exponent of a social gospel that offered hope and friendship to men of all races and creeds.

Rauschenbusch was by no means the first religious leader in Rochester to extend a welcome hand to the immigrant. Most of these newcomers had, as we have seen, established churches of their own shortly after their arrival, and the strong Catholic, Lutheran, and German Evangelical churches had early become rallying points for later migrants. The German Baptists and Methodists, the Scotch Presbyterians and, for the English, the Episcopal church, had provided other havens for newcomers. Shortly after his return from theological study in Rome, Dr. Edward J. Hanna, formerly a classmate of Rauschenbusch in

the Rochester Free Academy, had in 1888 conducted a series of services in Italian at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Most of these efforts were designed to serve members of the same faith, but when in 1889 the Rev. Dr. William C. Gannett established the Boys' Evening Home at the Unitarian Church, it was entirely non-sectarian and soon attracted a number of poor Jewish lads into its warmhearted fellowship.

The Jews, by no means tardy in humanitarian efforts, took the lead in establishing Rochester's first permanent settlement house on Baden Street. There in May 1901, following a pattern already well developed in New York and elsewhere, several wives of the leading German Jews of B'rith Kodesh Temple opened a service center for the Polish and Russian Jews and other residents of the city's most crowded immigrant district. Mrs. Robert Stewart, who served for many years as its superintendent, soon had a staff of thirty volunteers who conducted classes in sewing, "kitchen gardening," music and dancing for girls, carpentry and gymnastics for boys, and English for adults. Although it reached but a small neighborhood, the good work it performed encouraged similar efforts in other parts of the city. Brick Church Institute served immigrant families in the First Ward, somewhat as St. Andrew's Brotherhood, established in 1893 by the Rev. Dr. Algernon Crapsey adjoining his church, did in the southeast section. A model housekeeping center launched by several members of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union opened in a house on Davis Street in 1908; its chief worker, Miss Florence Cross, soon moved it into the heart of an Italian neighborhood on Lewis Street, where it grew into Rochester's second settlement house.

Constructive as these responses were, they did not fully answer all needs. A social survey conducted by Dr. Rauschenbusch under the auspices of the state Y. M. C. A. in 1904 found

that Rochester, with a fourth of its adults born abroad, had some very real problems of assimilation. The rich cultural heritage of these many newcomers could, the committee believed, be successfully integrated with that of the older Americans, but only by a proper exercise of sympathy and understanding. Rochester, they declared, had a special obligation to its new immigrants—Italians, Slavs, and Jews. Measures were needed to check the congestion found in certain areas, to eradicate the child labor employed in some industries, and to provide suitable alternatives for the illicit sexual activity of the many unmarried adults with whom the city abounded. Rauschenbusch and his colleagues proposed several positive measures—improved recreational programs, a campaign for health and sex education, higher wages for young men to permit earlier marriage, and a revival of the religious and spiritual forces of the community.

In 1905 and again in 1907, economic reverses and increased unemployment aggravated the problem confronting many immigrant workers. A committee of seven appointed by the Chamber of Commerce to study the situation not only started a movement that led after two years to the organization of United Charities but also inspired two separate programs designed to reach nonchurchgoing residents in congested immigrant districts. Both Dr. Crapsey's Brotherhood meetings, held every Sabbath evening in the Lyceum Theater, and Dr. Paul Moore Strayer's Sunday Evening Hour in the National Theater drew crowds of interested listeners off the streets for several seasons after 1908 and helped to engender a cosmopolitan spirit. Among the practical offshoots of these gatherings were a free employment office, a provident loan society, and an active local branch of the North American Civic League. That last body, launched in 1911, made a special effort to organize a class in English for a new influx of Sicilians, opened a small library of

books in Polish and English in another district, and promoted the attendance of other immigrants at the public night-school programs.

Encouraged by the response in several quarters to the evening schools, the Board of Education in 1907 undertook a significant new venture. Sensing the need in crowded immigrant districts for community centers, it opened Schools No. 9, 14, 26, and West High to adult use every night of the week. Soon a battery of men's clubs, women's clubs, teenage clubs, and mixed societies appeared, and the pressure for the use of other school facilities mounted. Fourteen men's clubs formed a League of Civic Clubs, which elected Judge John B. M. Stephens of the juvenile court as its president and launched an ambitious program of civic forums. Distinguished lecturers from out of town—Bolton Hall, Lincoln Steffens, Governor Hughes—addressed these gatherings and left to sing the praise of Rochester's remarkable demonstration of citizenship in action. When the program proved a bit too active on the controversial level, as Socialists, advocates of unions, and critics of boss rule shared the platform with speakers on public health, gardening, domestic and fine arts, Edward J. Ward, who was engaged to direct the Social Center program, faced a sharp cut in his budget in 1910. But his success in drawing varied immigrant and native residents together on a community level won him a call the next year to Wisconsin to direct the launching of a neighborhood-unit plan in Milwaukee, which became the model for a nation-wide movement.

Another agency that devoted much attention to the problems of the immigrants was the *Common Good*. This 32-page monthly, an outgrowth in 1910 of the staff bulletin of Baden Street Settlement, enlisted the editorial assistance of the Rev. Edwin A. Rumball, Gannett's successor at the Unitarian

Church, and devoted most of its pages over the next four years to a many-sided analysis of the needs and opportunities of the foreign-born. Rumball conducted and published a penetrating Fourth Ward Survey, printed numerous autobiographical sketches of individual immigrants chosen as typical representatives not as leaders of their groups, reviewed the musical and dramatic programs of ethnic societies, and publicized the grievances of a newly formed women's union in the garment industry. Unfortunately the publication of that last article, on the eve of a bitter strike in Rochester's leading trade, cost Rumball his support and brought the *Common Good* to an end in 1914.

Yet the spirit of good will towards the immigrant persisted. Thus the newly formed City Club inaugurated a happy custom in July 1910 when it staged its first New Citizens' Banquet. Each member acted as host to a recently naturalized citizen on that and subsequent occasions as the club extended a hearty welcome to such newcomers. Although the City Club, preoccupied with its discussions of international questions after the outbreak of the World War, permitted its New Citizens' banquets to lapse after 1914, the practice was later resumed by the Chamber of Commerce and became a significant feature of its program.

Of course the outbreak of war in Europe stirred a resurgence of nationalism among several of the city's ethnic groups. It also created a new concern among some older Americans as to the loyalty of resident aliens. The rapid increase since 1900 in the number of newcomers from eastern and southern Europe had swelled the ranks of those born in Russia, including many Poles, to 7000 by 1910, those from Austria-Hungary to 2000, while the Italians exceeded 10,000 at that date and outnumbered even the Germans by 1914. Many recent migrants from these and other countries involved in the war were drawn back to

serve in their armies, and a new and bitter hostility divided their fellow countrymen in Rochester. Some of the small ethnic colonies—the Belgians, the Serbians, the Greeks—experienced a sudden rebirth of emotion for their suffering homelands.

As the crisis abroad deepened and America became increasingly involved, federal, state, and local authorities took steps to tighten their security measures. The U. S. Marshal made a census of the foreign-born employees of local industries, and although most of the 40,000 listed in this survey were naturalized citizens, many were aliens. The Chamber of Commerce cooperated with other bodies in creating an Americanization Committee, which scheduled a series of meetings featuring patriotic addresses in various languages and swelled the enrollment in citizenship courses to 2300 by the end of the year.

But while some Rochesterians worried about possible acts of sabotage, most citizens responded with generosity to the war-relief drives launched by the various ethnic groups. The Belgian Relief Committee, the first in the field, soon collected over \$19,000 for that ravaged country. Other committees quickly appeared and collected relief funds for France, Russia, Germany, Italy, and especially Britain. And with the formation of the Patriotic and Community Chest in 1917, the collection of these funds and those for local charitable agencies was combined in one drive that raised a total of \$4,800,000, one fifth of which was pledged to foreign relief funds.

The unflinching participation of citizens of foreign birth in the military services and the voluntary enlistment of many aliens in the American forces after the declaration of war helped to dispel fears and to create a new spirit of cooperation. At the close of the war a succession of enthusiastic welcome-home parties further enhanced the patriotic ardor of many citizens. Unfortunately, a lack of a sufficient number of suitable jobs,

coupled with a rise in prices, brought a brief recession and a revival of socialist agitation. Many alarmists, mindful of events in Russia, joined in promoting a "red scare." Other citizens, fearing that the great contributions of the foreign-born would be sacrificed by such hysterical repressions, determined to focus attention instead on the constructive benefits already brought to the city.

It was after an exploratory discussion of this objective by a Chamber of Commerce committee in September 1919 that its secretary, Miss Melissa Bingeman read an account of a homelands exhibit in Chicago. Intrigued by the idea and the title, she soon inspired the Chamber committee to take the lead in organizing a Homelands Exhibition in Rochester. With the cooperation of the Memorial Art Gallery, the Board of Education, the city administration, and other interested agencies, a Homelands Exhibition Committee was organized to stage a ten-day program at Exposition Park the next April. As the plans developed some 200 men and women of seventeen nationalities were drawn into active participation with other citizens on the working committees that prepared the exhibits for 24 booths, planned and rehearsed appropriate dramatic skits or musical numbers for each ethnic group, and enlisted over 2000 individuals from the varied societies as participants in these performances. The Exhibition proved a huge success, attracted a total of 160,000 visitors to the park, and won praise from every side.

Impressed by the acclaim it had received, the Chamber promptly created a Council for Better Citizenship to carry on the work. With Miss Bingeman as its secretary, it established an information bureau at No. 9 School and sponsored a series of English classes and a succession of "Know Your Country" programs in various social halls. The next February it staged the

first of a succession of New Citizen Suppers at which the newly naturalized men and women were greeted and welcomed into their new responsibility. The Council chairman that year was George Dietrich, the German-born former president of the Chamber, and among those welcomed as new citizens was Canadian-born Miss Bingeman. So many aliens fulfilled the requirements for full citizenship each year during the twenties that the Council found it desirable to hold three or four such suppers annually. And in 1928 it sponsored a Community Music Festival, which again drew the bands and choral societies of the various ethnic groups together for a four-day festival of high quality. A similar festival the next year proved equally gratifying.

### **Towards Ethnic Integration**

The immigrant influx, although checked by the First World War and further restricted by federal laws in 1921 and 1924, brought approximately 12,000 additional newcomers to Rochester during the twenties. Because of natural losses through death and emigration, the local increase barely exceeded 3000, but this with the shifts from one ethnic group to another was sufficient to again transform the character of Rochester's population. Thus, despite the adverse effect of the new immigrant quotas on the Italian migration generally, Rochester continued to attract many of those admitted, and nearly 5000 more arrived before 1930 when with their fellow nationals they comprised a third of the city's foreign-born total. Migrants continued to arrive from Poland, now an independent nation, swelling its local representation by 1300, but the Russian-born dropped sharply, while British and German newcomers barely offset the natural losses among these residents. Yet although the foreign-born total reached a high crest of 74,696 in 1930, its percentage of the city's population was already in sharp decline, and the totals likewise would drop in the thirties and in all ethnic cate-

gories of European origin.

But if the war and its aftermath had brought a check to the immigrant tide, events had also brought national distinctions more clearly into view, and several local ethnic groups achieved a new sense of self-respect. The Poles in particular, with the re-establishment of their national homeland, formed vigorous new societies and with their American-born offspring dominated the 17th Ward. The Ukrainians, who comprised most of those listed as Russians, organized a choir and established a Civic Center in order to rally support for the preservation of their ethnic identity. The Jews, reacting to new pogroms in Poland and Russia, and in the thirties in Germany, gave increasing support to the Zionist movement. Some of the older ethnic societies continued to maintain programs and cooperated in annual festivals or picnics, but other societies disintegrated as their members enjoyed fuller acceptance into the broader community.

The rise of Hitler and the mounting crisis abroad brought a new influx of immigrant refugees during the late thirties and early forties. Although the 700 Jews placed locally by the Rochester Refugee Service were few in number compared with earlier migrations of these and other people, the circumstances prompting their flight stirred public indignation and rallied a new and vigorous support for the Zionist cause. The outbreak of war and the invasion of Poland brought Rochesterians of Polish birth or ancestry a fresh challenge. Their efforts to raise relief funds and to place refugees were matched as the months progressed by local Hollanders, Norwegians, Greeks, and others whose homelands fell victims to Hitler's plunging armies. Few even among the German-born could defend his ravages, and the highhanded manner in which Hitler treated his Italian satellite helped to bind Rochester Italians to their adopted country. The loyal response of all ethnic groups to the American cause during

the war provided conclusive evidence of their readiness for full membership in the Rochester community.

If additional signs of their integration were desired, they could be found in several new developments within the varied ethnic groups. The annual picnics of the Italians, the Germans, the Poles, the Ukrainians, and the Dutch continued to draw large crowds, but they included many second- and third-generation Americans, and the number who could understand old-country phrases was dwindling. Speeches were now almost entirely in English, and even the so-called foreign-language press had now switched to English. Only two or three churches conducted a few of their services in old-country tongues. Italian, Polish, and Ukrainian culture clubs strove to keep their native tongues alive at least for the purpose of dramatic expression and enjoyment, but their task was easier in the field of song than in speech. Although the circulation scarcely justified the effort, the Rochester Public Library maintained a collection of some 6000 books in a dozen foreign languages in 1942. The next two decades brought a shift in emphasis as students interested in improving their grasp of foreign languages or in reading books not available in translation increased in number and prompted the purchase of additional books to meet this more cosmopolitan demand.

A cosmopolitan spirit was evident in other ethnic trends. As the number of such groups seeking picnic sites on the same August Saturdays increased, several found themselves in close proximity and sometimes engaged in friendly competitions. The city staged its first International Day at Ontario Beach Park in 1952, attracting 10,000 picnickers. Similar events in succeeding years drew larger throngs until in 1958 a 35,000 turnout from ten nationalities overtaxed the facilities at the park. The Art Gallery, the Museum of Arts and Sciences, and the University

of Rochester each staged programs and exhibits that combined the interests and talents of several ethnic groups, and a Cosmopolitan Club formed in 1943 drew foreign students at the University and foreign-born residents in the city together several times each year for lively sessions of a social and cultural character. Its Festival of Nations in 1950 inspired a similar effort sponsored by the Rochester Association for the United Nations at the County Fair two years later. And in 1958 the Junior Chamber scheduled the first of several annual Thanksgiving Day dinners for newly naturalized citizens. The senior Chamber brought its long series of New Citizen Suppers, of which it had held over 80, to a conclusion in 1961.

Following the close of the war Rochester's ethnic composition has taken a new turn. The relatively small trickle of war brides and adopted children brought back by returning servicemen in the late forties and early fifties added fresh new ethnic touches from Japan, Korea, and the Philippines as well as from Europe. New groups of refugees from Hungary, Poland, and elsewhere reached Rochester, but these and other newcomers from abroad did not equal in number the natural losses among the foreign-born, whose total dropped to 49,127 in 1950 and to 42,044 by 1960. Part of this decline was due to a migration to the suburbs where in 1960 the foreign-born numbered 16,446, as compared with only 12,914 a decade before. Yet the metropolitan total of the foreign-born showed a drop of 3500 in that period.

These losses may have accounted in part for a steady rise in these decades in the number of non-white residents. Thus the Negroes, whose total had barely doubled in the half century following the Civil War, experienced a more rapid increase. The 879 of 1910 almost doubled in the war decade and more than tripled by 1930. They added another 600 during the depression years and then more than doubled in the forties and

more than tripled in the fifties. By 1960 Rochester's non-white residents included 23,586 Negroes and 642 Asiatics. Some 2000 or more Puerto Ricans were separately classified but shared with the Negroes the poorer residential districts from which the old nationality groups were migrating.

Rochester's Negro pioneers, who arrived with the first settlers and who comprised approximately 3 per cent of the town's inhabitants throughout its village days, founded the predecessor of the present African Zion Methodist Church in 1823. The failure of the small Negro colony to keep pace with the city's growth delayed the formation of other churches and the development of a full battery of societies until after 1900 when the non-white population began to show an increase. Yet despite their limited number, the Negroes of Rochester produced several distinguished leaders, notably Frederick Douglass, who ranks with the city's top three or four historic personalities. Nearly half of the 500 resident Negroes of the post-Civil War era were widely scattered throughout the city, but most of the other half found lodgment on or near Clarissa Street in the old Third Ward where by 1900 some 45 Negro families owned their own homes. Several Negroes from Rochester and elsewhere attended the University, the Eastman School, the Theological Seminary, or Mechanics Institute, and several Negro clergymen and other professional men served the Clarissa Street community which had its Douglass Club and other organizations.

A number of Negroes joined with friends in establishing a local branch of the NAACP in 1919. By this date, the increase in their number was creating a new tension that became more evident during succeeding decades. As newcomers arrived, many settled in the old immigrant district around Baden Street on the northeast side, and the congestion there soon transformed that blighted area into a wretched slum, which the city

finally in the fifties endeavored to eradicate. A continued increase in population, coupled with the problems of urban redevelopment, aggravated the Negro's difficulties in finding a home and intensified the friction within the Negro community and on its expanding periphery.

The problems seemed cumulative. The Negro churches, following the American pattern, tended to multiply in number rather than to develop as strong neighborhood parishes, and seemed unable to cope with the problem. Baden and Lewis Street settlements on the east side remodeled their programs to serve their new neighbors, and the Montgomery Neighborhood Center appeared in the Clarrisa Street community, but the problems arising from congestion within and discrimination beyond the borders of the two districts proved too great for easy solution. As with the challenges presented by earlier waves of ethnic immigrants—in the Know Nothing period or in Walter Rauschenbusch's day, to recall two periods of crisis—the city was suddenly awakened early in 1963 to the need for a renewed effort at integration.

It is too early to appraise the work of the Human Relations Commission, the Police Advisory Board, and the other agencies that have been created to meet this challenge. But formal organizations can only supervise the adjustments that citizens white and black must make to live peacefully one with another. Only as Rochester welcomes this continuing influx of new residents to full economic and social as well as political citizenship will it be able to reap the benefits of the skills and talents they bring.