

# FIRST SETTLERS CAME HERE IN

Wet and Dry 'Groceries' Popular Stock in Log Cabin;  
Wolves Entered Home of George Head to Kill Sheep

From W. H. Mitchell's History of Olmsted County, published in 1866.

NOT until the spring of 1854, was the first settlement made in the territory of what is now the city of Rochester. At that time T. C. Cummings and Robert McReedy made claims, and built their shanties near Cascade creek. On July 12, George and Jonathan Head, with their father, made claims where the business part of the city is now situated, and on the 25th day of the same month, the city was staked out, and had a fine appearance on paper. It had already become a station for stages to stop at, as on the 15th of July, M. O. Walker, the pioneer stage proprietor of the West, established a line of stages from Dubuque to St. Paul, over the wilderness prairies, and through the prospective city of Rochester.

Winona and Ellota were at that time the nearest post towns. The neighbors the first winter were few, the families of F. Prodger, McReedy and Geo. Woolrod, being the only ones within seven miles of the new city. In the following spring, there was quite an extensive emigration and business prospects became apparent.

### Wet and Dry Groceries

J. D. Jenkins built a store of logs and sold it to Hugh Mair, who soon filled it with goods for the accommodation of the rapidly increasing population. Wet and dry groceries seemed to be the most important articles of the stock. A cask of gin, of this stock, was the first intoxicating liquor ever brought to the town.

The "boys" used to frequently parake of Mair's "best" without the preliminary of paying for it, or having it dealt out by the glass, but the old man was shrewd enough to make them pay for it all in the end.

The cask was never allowed to get empty, so long as there was plenty of water in the Zumbro, and it is currently reported that when cold weather came on, the whiskey froze so hard that it had to be sold in chunks, and thawed by the fire, before it could be drunk.

In the summer of 1854, George Head erected a log house commodious enough as a dwelling, but quite small for a house of public entertainment, yet the tide of emigration was so great that the house was filled to the utmost capacity at all times.

All the provisions at this time had to be imported from Iowa, and consequently bore a very high price. Head continued to keep the hotel till the spring of 1856, when he sold out to Asa Le Suer, who has kept it in operation ever since. (1866), although the old log house has been torn down, and a neat and commodious hotel taken its place, a little farther up Broadway than the old stand, which is now known as the "York State House."

### First Birth Reported Here

The first birth in Rochester was in the family of James Smith, in 1855. A Mr. Brown, who was looking for a claim, camped on the north side of the Zumbro on the school section in the fall of 1854, and soon thereafter was taken sick and died; this was the first death of a white person on the prairie or in Olmsted county.

Very soon after his death, his widow took another man, but was not married to him as there was no one here to perform the ceremony, yet they did the best they could, and procured witnesses to their agreement to get married as soon as there was a chance and even had McReedy perform such service as he could, to last till there should come along a minister, or someone in authority. This was the

first matrimonial speculation publicly entered into in this vicinity.

The first schoolhouse was erected in the spring of 1856, in east Rochester. It was built of logs, and did duty as a schoolhouse, church and place for elections, and all kinds of public meetings. Miss Mary Walker taught school therein the summer following.

The first religious service was held by a minister from St. Paul, who was traveling through the county on business, and preached in December, 1854, at McReedy's house one evening and the next evening at Head's. No other religious service was had until the following March, when Rev. Robert Welch, a Baptist minister, commenced regular service and continued the same until the next June when Rev. Reuben Reynolds, a Congregational minister, assumed the duties of pastor, and remained the only preacher of the county until some time in 1858.

### Wolves Troublesome

This summer (1855) the wolves were quite troublesome, and committed frequent depredations on the property of persons who had neglected to put their effects out of their reach. In one instance, they entered the dwelling house of Geo. Head, and carried off a sheep that had been killed to furnish mutton for the breakfast of a company of travelers, although a number of persons were sleeping in the room over the one where the robbery took place.

The first lawyer made his appearance this summer, a Mr. Jay Parker, but he flourished only for a short time and left the place. The tide of immigration to the embryo city was setting in rapidly, and buildings were going up in various directions so that neighbors were within speaking distance.

W. D. Lowry bought the claim of George Woolford, about one-half mile south of the city plat, now within the city limits. In the fall of this year, Mr. Lowry was elected to a seat in the territorial council, which position he occupied until the admission of Minnesota as a state in 1858.

Parties at Oronoco and Chatfield were anxious to have the district so divided that each of those towns should be the geographical center of a county, and consequently a county seat. To this arrangement the citizens of Rochester were very naturally opposed. Mr. Lowry was the candidate of the people of Rochester and Reuben Ottman of Oronoco, the opposing candidate. Probably no more entire vote has ever been cast in Olmsted county, under any circumstances, and when the result was made known, it was found that Lowry had beaten his opponent by two to one, and twenty-seven to spare.

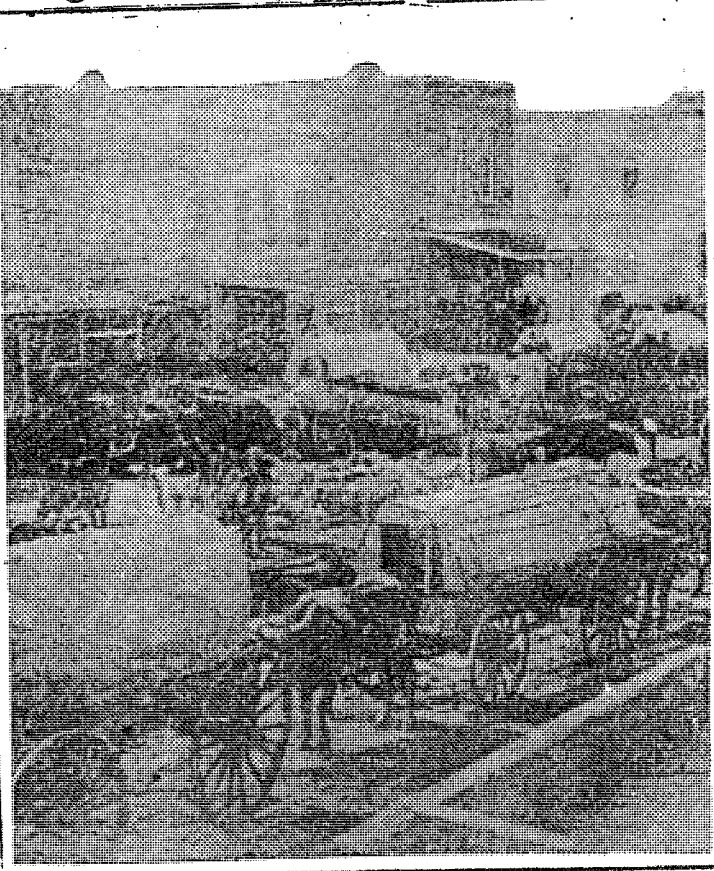
In the early history of the county, there was frequently much trouble experienced by newcomers jumping the claims of those who had preceded them. Emigration was rapid and in many instances persons made and staked out their claims and went for their families, but on their return found them jumped by other parties, and they must seek new locations.

### Vigilance Committee

This evil became so prevalent that the settlers organized a Vigilance committee for the protection of settlers' claims. This committee was known as the Regulators, and was composed in part of the following persons: T. C. Cummings, Grant Cummings, L. W. Bucklin, J. A. Bucklin, James Lovering, B. Goodwin, A. Goodwin, William Eaton, Charles Martin and S. S. Goodrich.

### Work of the Regulators

Sometime in the winter of 1855, Charles Martin made a claim in the town of Kalmar, and commenced



Broadway in 1865—Covered Wagon Days

getting his logs ready to build a house, when a fellow by the name of Moler heard of it and went and bargained for a house to move on and jump the claim. The Regulators were notified, and, not wishing any trouble, but bound to protect the claimant in his rights, they went to Kalmar, leaving Rochester about nine o'clock in the evening, and called on the man that owned the house, and bought and moved it to the claim and had it ready for occupancy before Moler got there the next morning. It was a bitter cold night in the winter, yet the men worked all night. They considered it a good night's work, to travel eight miles and move a house and get it ready to occupy in the morning.

### Court in a Cornfield

The first lawsuit was tried before James Bucklin in the summer of 1855. At the hour appointed for the suit to commence, the justice was hoeing corn and as it was a very busy season, and work hurrying, the parties assembled in the corn field and the suit was called. The parties were T. C. Cummings, plaintiff, and Alfred Moler, defendant; James A. Bucklin, attorney for the plaintiff, and G. W. Chilson, attorney for the defendant. The court proceeded and the plaintiff won the case.

### Rival Sections of City

A rivalry had sprung up between the two locations of Head and McReedy, and when the Fourth of July came around, each of the parties determined to have a celebration. Head had it proclaimed throughout the settlement that he would roast a sheep and regale his friends with mutton, while McReedy made a barbecue of a yearling steer. Some forty or fifty assembled at each place, and held high carnival throughout the day. At McReedy's celebration, a speech was made by an ambitious young lawyer named Tompkins, who was finally so overcome by patriotism and whiskey that he fell from the box on which he was standing, and his arm coming in contact with a scythe, it was nearly severed from his body. His wound was dressed, and he was taken home a soberer and sadder man.

### A Curious Saw Mill

The first saw mill in the town was of a somewhat curious construction and consisted of a scaffolding erected some six or eight feet in height. The saw used was a long, narrow saw called a whip saw, with a strong handle at each end. The frame work of the scaffolding was so arranged that the log could be gated to produce lumber of any desired thickness. The motive power was a man at each handle of the saw, one of whom stood on the log and the other beneath or as it was called in the pit; hence it derived the name of the pit saw. These mills are quite common in the old country, and in this instance was made of great benefit in a new country. Mr. Alexander, the proprietor, assured us that two men would frequently manufacture as much as 500 feet of lumber in a day. To the pioneers who were yet destitute of mills driven by water or steam, this was of vast importance, and many are the houses made comfortable by use of the lumber manufactured by the pit mill.

### The First Frame Shop

Messrs. Alexander and Goldsworthy built the first frame shop in the spring of 1856, on Zumbro street, where it did duty as a shop until 1861, when it was removed to Broadway and fitted up for a store.

### Steam Mill and Sash Factory

In the following year Messrs. Alexander and Goldsworthy built a fine steam mill and sash factory, on the Zumbro in east Rochester, to which they soon added machinery for planing and general cabinet making. This mill was continued in successful operation till the summer of 1863 when it took fire and burned to the ground.

### A Bridge Across the Zumbro

In the fall of 1855, Messrs. L. W. Bucklin and James Livingston built the first bridge across the Zumbro at a point opposite where Cook's Livery stood later. It was built of logs and remained in use till another bridge was built in 1857.

### The Mill's Start

In 1856, Hon. F. A. Olds, purchased of Messrs. Moe and Cross, the property on the corner of Broadway and College street, known as the Mill Reservation,

## Settlers Annoyed By Many Wolves

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and commenced the erection of a stone flouring mill, which he completed the following year at an expense of \$0,000. This was the first substantial public improvement that was undertaken. Judge Olds built several blocks of buildings and was very active in all public enterprises. Probably no one individual contributed more to the growth and prosperity of the city than Mr. Olds. In the summer of 1864, while superintending some work on his farm house in the western part of the county, he fell from the scaffolding and received injuries from which he never recovered, but died soon after, respected and regretted by all who knew him.

### The Boston Company

In the summer of 1854, Fred Prodger and Henry Woodard, made claim to the northern part of the city, and pre-empted the same in 1865, and sold the same year to C. H. Lindsley, who sold a three-fourths interest in the whole to Messrs. G. S. Harris, W. W. Cowles, Daniel Williams and Richard B. Smith of Boston and the company assumed the name of the "Boston Company," and commenced operations for building upon and improving their property. Mr. Lindsley, resident proprietor, was chosen as business manager. This year they commenced the erection of the Zumbro Falls Mills, a large hotel, the present court house, (old Broadway House, since dismantled), and several other buildings, making preparations for extensive improvements the ensuing year. But the financial revolution of 1857 included in the list of its victims the original Boston company and, after expending some \$53,000, they were obliged to suspend operations, and the property was transferred to the hands of their creditors, Messrs. Alvin Smith, J. H. Ward, David Loring, and John M. Cole, all of Boston. This failure proved the death blow to improvements in the lower town, as the title came under a cloud so that all parties did not wish to invest, no matter how desirable the property.

### Cole's Mill Starts

In the final division of the property among the proprietors, the courthouse went into the hands of Mr. Lindsley and the flouring mills fell to the share of John M. Cole, who in 1860 removed to Rochester and put the mills in the best of order and made it valuable to himself and the city.

### Mills and Water Power

In 1863 L. H. Humason and Gilbert Smith erected the third flouring mill in the city on Cascade creek, a short distance above where it empties into the Zumbro. The streams that afforded water power to the city were subject to great variations in the stages of the water; sometimes in seasons of extreme drouth, affording scarcely water enough to turn the machinery, and in times of freshet being swollen so as to overflow their banks.

### High Waters

In the summer of 1862 Bear creek and the Zumbro river rose so rapidly from the effects of heavy



Broadway in 1869, showing in the foreground the large structure is the Hanover House.

rains that all the bridges were carried away, and considerable damage done to the mill property. One man, Nathan B. Robins, in attempting to swim across the reservoir, just above the Zumbro Falls Mills was drowned. In August, 1866, people retired to their beds with a feeling of perfect security, never dreaming that they were to witness so grand and yet so fearful a spectacle, when the morning dawned. At 2 o'clock on the morning of the 7th, there was no perceptible rise in the streams, but at 4 o'clock, families living on the low grounds on the north side of the river, were aroused from their sleep by the rush of water entering their dwellings, and so rapidly did the waters advance, that they only had time to save themselves by taking refuge in trees, which fortunately grew close by. They remained in this situation with the waters roaring and rushing madly beneath them, and threatening to destroy their last refuge until about 9 o'clock, when they were rescued by some courageous and noble hearted men who procured boats and at the risk of their own lives, saved their neighbors.

### The First Brick House

The first brick business house in Rochester was built by Dr. L. H. Kelly, formerly of Painesville, O. He built a brick store, 22 by 70 feet on the corner of Broadway and College streets and finished it in the best manner for use. (This store is still standing and is now occupied by the Quality Print Shop.)