

Alexander M. Stewart  
Again Looks Backward

# History of the GENESEE RIVER

### Foreword

HUMANITY FINDS SOME WAY OF EMIGRATING TO ANOTHER PLANET, THE EXPLORATION OF AMERICA WILL STAND AS THE GREATEST ADVENTURE OF THE WHITE RACE AND THE GREATEST ADVENTURES OF ALL IN THIS ADVENTURE, FRENCH MISSIONARIES AND SENECA INDIANS OF THE GENESEE PLAYED PARTS WHICH CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN.

This is the third annual historical section to appear in the REVIEW AND CALENDAR SUPPLEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC COURIER, to make its contribution to the better knowledge of the French exploration in the Seneca region which is now the Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

A constant lookout for new sources of information on this period has brought to light very little writing by Dutch and English visitors to the Seneca, and very much by French Catholic explorers and missionaries. Most of these historical writings by French Catholics are translated into English and are in local libraries ready for reference. The CATHOLIC COURIER by these articles is promoting the fair use of these sources in the teaching of local history and helping thereby to dispel those prejudices which must arise when these sources continue to be neglected.

Last year's historical section was honored by a letter from the Very Reverend A. Ledochowski, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Vatican City, Rome, Italy. Letters from the cathedral in Mindanao, Philippine Islands; from the Library of Harvard University; from the Wisconsin Historical Society; from the Reverend A. Melancon, Historian for the Jesuits of Canada; and from many leaders in churches and education—all show that our seventeenth century history is worthy of the highest appreciation.

And with good reason has our local history attracted international attention. As long as there are intelligent, historically minded men in foreign countries, there will be large interest in what happened in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in America beyond the thin fringe of English colonies on the Atlantic Coast.

### Pioneer



Louis Thomas de Joncaire

LOUIS THOMAS DE JONCAIRE figured prominently in the earliest recorded history of the Genesee River. (See page 35 et seq.) The above illustration is purely imaginative, but it represents accurately the general characteristics of the early explorers of this region.

A description of the location of the Genesee River will help these readers in foreign countries to understand this historical essay.

### LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The Genesee River is the only river with its source in Pennsylvania which flows into Lake Ontario. The Genesee rises in Potter County, Pennsylvania, near Hlyssia and Condesa. (See Illustrations.) The hill country around sources rises to 2600 feet above sea level. Rose Lake, the source of the Genesee, is one of the sources of the Allegheny River, a tributary of the Mississippi. Another Mississippi tributary has its source in British Columbia, 2000 miles away.

The Genesee traverses New York State in a general northerly direction, 110 miles, and empties into Lake Ontario. Seven miles from its mouth it passes through the center of the City of Rochester. A series of rapids and three waterfalls come down to a gorge with perpendicular rocky walls 200 feet high in the City of Rochester. A total drop of 215 feet in the river within the city cuts off navigation from the upper river to the lake. Its mouth is 78 miles east of the Niagara River and 61 miles west of the Oswego River. From the mouth of the Genesee across Lake Ontario to Brighton, Canada, is 53 miles. Lake Ontario is 170 miles long and from any point of view the Lake gives the boundless appearance of an ocean. The lake is 245 feet above sea level. Four hundred and fifty miles northeast of the mouth of the Genesee River is the ancient city of Quebec on the St. Lawrence River, which is the outlet of Lake Ontario. For more than a quarter of a century of Quebec was the starting point for the early missionaries and explorers of the Genesee Country.

Five miles east of the mouth of the Genesee River and opening out of Lake Ontario is Irondequoit Bay which, before the ice age, was the mouth of the River. This bay extends inland four miles and is watered by Irondequoit Creek draining into it extends much farther. Before the founding of Rochester in 1812, and during the Indian and colonial period, the head of Irondequoit Bay at Indian Landing in Ellison Park was the principal port and harbor for the Seneca Indian country.

Going from Indian Landing on Irondequoit Creek westward, a trail with gentle rises led along the northern base of the Cobbs Hill-Mount Hope range of hills into Indian Trail and Glen Avenues in Mount Hope Cemetery, thence to the river at the Lehigh Railroad underpass. It was a five mile carry.

This five mile portage made Irondequoit Bay the trade outlet of the Genesee until after the founding of Rochester. More than fifty different spellings of Irondequoit from more than fifty different writers occur in the index of Colonial Documents, which indicates the importance of this trade outlet of the Genesee in Colonial times.

The falls of the Genesee which defied navigation attracted milling. In 1789, Ebenezer Allen built a mill for grinding grain. It was beside the river in the forest about twenty rods from the site of "the Four Corners", in the heart of Rochester.

In 1812, Nathaniel Rochester began selling village lots on the 100-acre tract which Allen had previously owned. When peace with England was established at the close of the War of 1812, and the Indians had been made to retire to less productive lands, population began to crowd into the new country which, when cleared of trees, grew good wheat.

By 1834, Rochester had become the greatest flour milling city in the world, producing 300,000 barrels of flour annually. Mills by the falls multiplied until 600,000 barrels of flour were produced in a year by the power of the Genesee. When wheat production failed, Minneapolis, Minnesota, took the milling crown from Rochester. But the falls of the Genesee now produce light, heat and power.

Despite the loss of the flour milling industry, Rochester on its one hundredth birthday had a population of 340,000 people, and the Catholic Diocese of Rochester more than 450,000 inhabitants. Its many varieties of manufacturing are known the world over.

Above the City of Rochester the river meanders for more than forty miles through a rich alluvial country, in which are many glacial sand and gravel hills. Important among the many creeks in seventeenth century Indian history which drain into this stretch of the river is Honeoye Creek, which enters the east side of the river at Golah, 21 miles from Lake Ontario. On sites near this creek were located Seneca villages for centuries. In them, before 1700, Jesuit Chapels were centers of worship. Another Honeoye Creek enters the river near Belfast.

At Mount Morris the river comes abruptly, as through a doorway into the plain out of a gorge with rocky overhanging walls 400 feet high, extending southward ten miles. Reverse curves in the gorge make its length nearly double this distance. Navigation up the gorge in canoes is possible when there is not a drought and low water. There is a power dam now at Mount Morris. Upon entering the gorge in canoes, it is possible to proceed between rocky walls to the foot of the lower falls in Letchworth Park. These falls are 71 feet in height. Above these there is a middle fall of 107 feet and 300 feet wide. Farther up the river, but less than three miles from the lower falls is the upper falls of 70 feet.

A state park provided for the people by the late Mr. William Pryor Letchworth, a member of the Society of Friends, protects the beauty of this magnificent scenery. Here in these falls, as in the Rochester series of falls, is an immense barrier against the use of this river as a canoe highway to Allegheny-Mississippi waters. How was this overcome? About half a mile below the lower falls in Letchworth Park on the east side of the river there is a path running up out of the gorge. This is known as the Portage Trail. It climbs to the top of the bank and continues to Portageville, above the head of the falls, where an easy natural grade made it possible for the voyager to carry his canoes down and place them in the river.

Seventeen miles' paddle above Letchworth Park with some wading up rapids, assuming that the level of the water in the river is convenient for travel and modern dams are not in the way, brings voyagers to Black Creek, in Allegheny County near Belfast, on the west side. This spot on Black Creek is the one where the

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