

# Landmark Online Tours

## The Central City Tour

The Landmark Society of Western New York  
133 South Fitzhugh Street  
Rochester NY 14608  
[www.landmarksociety.org](http://www.landmarksociety.org)

### About This Tour

This tour is a 4/5<sup>th</sup> of a mile loop that crosses and parallels the Genesee River. This route mixes historic buildings with contemporary office and hotel buildings. For tour maps, see last pages.

Rochester city streets on a whole are pedestrian, wheelchair and stroller friendly. In particular, for those taking this tour it is possible to stay exclusively on city sidewalks, with only a few driveways and alleys to cross.

**Historic Highlights** These are 24 sites along the tour; including 2 districts, 3 bridges and 13 buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Main Street Bridge.

A most appropriate place to start a tour of Rochester is the south side of the **Main Street Bridge** (1857) (1). This limestone bridge is the fourth on this site; the first one, of wood, was finished in 1812. From the 1850s to the mid-1960s, the **Main Street Bridge** was actually lined with a variety of commercial buildings, making the river almost invisible from the bridge.

The Genesee River, which bisects downtown and is directly involved with this city's founding and growth, flows north to Lake Ontario. It is one of the few in the country with this natural characteristic. Used as a source of waterpower since the early 1800s, the river was of utmost importance to Colonel Nathaniel Rochester, a Maryland pioneer who developed a 100-acre tract on the Genesee west bank. This settlement formed the nucleus of the village of Rochesterville, which was chartered in 1817 and eventually grew to become the city of Rochester by 1834.

The Erie Canal, created between 1817 and 1825, made Rochester into what has been called "America's first boomtown." With the canal, flour ground at the mills, utilizing Genesee River waterpower, had easy access to population centers in the East.

*From Main Street Bridge, look south for a view of Broad Street Bridge.*

The Broad Street Bridge was once a 19<sup>th</sup>-century engineering marvel, the **Erie Canal Aqueduct** (2), built to carry the Erie Canal Waters over the Genesee River. Broad Street is now supported by the top tier of arches built over the aqueduct in the 1920s.

The aqueduct you are now looking at was built in 1842, replacing an earlier one. Constructed of Onondaga Limestone, the 1842 aqueduct was the only one on the Erie Canal to carry both a water trough and a towpath over a river. The success of the Erie Canal Aqueduct in withstanding the immense ice flows and high spring waters that destroyed earlier bridges and aqueducts influenced the design of Rochester's other downtown bridges. Their low, broadly sprung arches are intended not to impede the flow of the river to the raceways.

The canal was abandoned in 1920, and subsequently the second tier was added to the bridge. From the 1920s to 1956, Rochester's subway system occupied the former canal bed.



Broad Street Bridge

*From the center of Main Street Bridge, look toward the right.*

Along the West bank is **Aqueduct Park** (3) and a cluster of late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century industrial buildings that now serve as the corporate offices of **West Group** (4), a publishing company. The statue of Mercury (1881) formerly stood atop the Kimball Tobacco Factory building across the street.

In a 1788 treaty with the Seneca Indians, Oliver Phelps received a parcel of land on the west side of the river in exchange for building a saw mill and grist mill. To meet this obligation, Phelps gave Ebenezer "Indian" Allan a 100-acre tract on the west bank of the river as payment for building the mills. Allan was known by the nickname "Indian" because he was married to a Native American woman and traded with the Native Americans.

While on the bridge, note the sculptured guardrail, created in 1989 by Rochester-based artist Albert Paley. This sculpture was a gift to the City of Rochester by Bausch and Lomb, Inc., a company founded in Rochester in 1853.



Aqueduct Park

*Walking west past Aqueduct Park, you will reach 25 E. Main Street.*

**The Talman Building (5)** is the site at which **Frederick Douglass**, renowned abolitionist and former slave, published the *North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper.

Douglass, who escaped slavery in 1838, came to pro-abolitionist Rochester in 1847 to start the *North Star* after gaining renown as an anti-slavery lecturer and writer. The *North Star* ceased publication during the Civil War and Douglass moved to Washington, D.C. in 1872. Douglass died in Washington on February 20, 1895. His body was returned to Rochester, and he is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery.



**Talman Building**

*Now look across E. Main Street. You'll see the Reynolds Arcade, 16 E. Main Street, designed by the local firm of Gordon and Kaelber and constructed in*

The **Reynolds Arcade (6)** displays the Art Deco style popular during the 1920s and 1930s. The building you are looking at is the second Reynolds Arcade Building. The original five-story Reynolds Arcade was built on the site in 1828 by Abelard Reynolds and was a popular gathering place for business and community leaders. In addition to its commercial and office space, it housed both the central post office and the city's first public library. The headquarters of the Western Union Telegraph, founded in Rochester, was located in the Reynolds Arcade from 1856 to 1866.



**Reynolds Arcade**

*Continue west to the next intersection, which is Rochester's Four Corners (Main, State, and Exchange Boulevard).*

The **Four Corners (7)** is the city's traditional business and financial center. It was laid out in 1811 when Colonel Nathaniel Rochester began to develop his 100-acre tract that would grow to become the city of Rochester. A native of Maryland, Colonel Rochester chose a southern-style grid system layout consisting of parallel streets and a central courthouse square. Two broad streets were staked out, each six rods (33 yards) wide: Buffalo Street (the present Main Street) extended westward from the newly constructed wooden bridge over the river and Carroll Street (now State and Exchange Streets) ran north and south, crossing Buffalo Street to form the Four Corners.



**Wilder Building**

At the southeast corner of Main and Exchange Boulevard is the **Wilder Building (8)** (Eight Exchange Boulevard), Rochester's foremost example of Richardsonian Romanesque office architecture, a style named for noted American architect, Henry H. Richardson. The rusticated stonework on the first floor, pressed brickwork decorated with terra cotta on the upper floors, the multiple arched windows, and the decorative turrets provide the characteristic Richardsonian effect. For a short time, it was the tallest building in the city, surpassing even the Powers Building across the street, until the latter was raised still higher to outdo its new competition. A pioneering structure, the Wilder Building is significant as a forerunner of the modern skyscraper that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

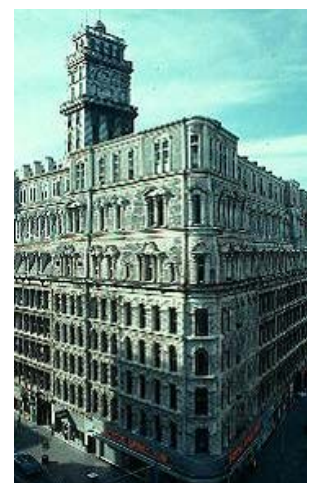
Designed by local architects Andrew Jackson Warner and William Brockett, the building was constructed by Samuel Wilder, a prominent banker and real estate developer, in 1888.

*Now cross W. Main Street and proceed north along the east side of State Street. Look across the street at the Powers Building (16 W. Main Street).*

With its triple mansard roof and iron observation tower, the **Powers Building (9)** was for many years the largest and tallest building in the city. Built in 1869 for Rochester entrepreneur Daniel Powers, this Second Empire-style building—so called because of its references to French architecture—was designed by local architect Andrew Jackson Warner. It was originally a five-story building with an elaborate stone exterior and a single mansard roof.

During the 1870s and 1880s, additional stories and a tower were constructed. As textbook examples of cast iron construction, the exteriors of the additions imitate the decorative details of the original stone corner block. The spacious interiors remain intact and include a large, open, cast-iron staircase and marble floors.

*Walk north along State Street and you will immediately see two distinctive buildings.*



**Powers Building**



The former First National Bank



Ellwanger & Barry Building

Across State Street is the **First National Bank Building (10)**, 35 State Street, built in 1924 in the Classical Revival style.

At 39-45 State Street is the **Ellwanger & Barry Building (11)** designed by A. J. Warner and built in 1888 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The building was erected by the realty company owned by George Ellwanger and Patrick Barry, the noted horticulturists who were largely responsible for Rochester's fame as "The Flower City."

Just north of Church Street on the west side of **State Street between 107 and 173 (12)**, is a surviving example of an uninterrupted row of mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup>-century commercial facades. Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Neo-Classical and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century commercial styles are all present in this visually cohesive group that comprises the State Street National Register Historic District.

The Genesee River was known by the Seneca Indians as Casconchiagon, "river-of-falls-upon-it." At the **Andrews Street Bridge (13)** (1893) you are upstream and cannot see the spectacular 88-foot waterfall that is less than 900 feet away.

*Looking south you can see the Sister Cities Pedestrian Bridge and the Main Street Bridge.*

Between these bridges, the Genesee River was once lined by industrial and commercial buildings, creating an "urban canyon" from the 1850s until the mid-1960s, when many structures were razed to make the river more accessible for public recreation.

This vigorous industrial and commercial area also extended farther north along the Genesee. Initially residential, the area became increasingly industrial after the Civil War. By 1900, the space was dense with tall commercial and industrial buildings. Water-powered industries and foundries stood on the riverbanks, while lighter industries and clothing manufacturers were located along streets east of the river. The area remained intensely developed until after World War II.

Fortunately, many of these buildings still survive here in the **St. Paul/North Water Streets Historic District (14)**, which you will see as you continue walking east on Andrews Street.

The district is comprised of North Water Street, the west side of St. Paul Street (between Andrews Street and Central Avenue), the



The Andrews Street Bridge



The Ellis Building

Many former industrial buildings here have been converted into apartments, restaurants, offices and shops. Two buildings of particular note are: the **Ellis Building (14)**, 185 North Water Street, the six-story Romanesque Revival brick structure designed by Harvey Ellis, a Rochester native who was one of America's most innovative late 19<sup>th</sup>-century designers, and **174 -180 St. Paul Street (15)**, Rochester's first conversion to loft apartments. The Ellis Building contains massive Doric piers supporting a second-story cornice, round-arched windows, and a denticulated metal cornice.

*Continue walking down Andrews Street to the corner of St. Paul Street.*

Listed separately on the National Register, the Romanesque Revival brick building at **214-216 Andrews Street (16)** housed clothing manufacturers from its initial 1890s' construction until 1983. The building has been converted to apartments.



216 Andrews Street

*Turn right (south) on St. Paul Street, heading back toward Main Street. On your left you'll see Pleasant Street.*



**H.H. Warner Building**

If you have an extra few minutes, walk down Pleasant Street for a view of **Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph's Church (17)** (10 Pleasant Street). Known affectionately as "The Little French Church," the congregation was formed by French-speaking Catholics from Belgium and the Netherlands. The church building was erected in 1868 in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century interpretation of the French Renaissance style.



**Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph's Church**

*Walk south on St. Paul Street. The H. H. Warner Building (72-78 St. Paul Street) is on your left.*

This seven-story cast-iron and brick building was constructed in 1882 for one of Rochester's most colorful entrepreneurs, patent-medicine king H. H. Warner. With its Romanesque and Gothic details, and its symmetrical façade, elaborately decorated with cast iron and Berea stone piers, the **H. H. Warner Building (18)** is a renowned example of 19<sup>th</sup>-century cast-iron architecture.



**View along St. Paul Street**

Across the street is the **Chamber of Commerce Building (19)** (55 St. Paul Street). Constructed in 1916, the Chamber of Commerce was designed by Claude Bragdon, Rochester's foremost early 20<sup>th</sup>-century architect. The Neo-Classical building was a gift to the community from George Eastman. The St. Paul Street façade is faced in limestone and features a bracketed entrance hood, wrought-iron balconies and a roof balustrade.



**Chamber of Commerce Building**

Behind the Chamber building you can walk to and across the river on the

*Located on the east side of St. Paul Street are two additional commercial buildings noted for their distinctive architecture.*

The **Cox Building (20)** (36-48 St. Paul Street), built in the 1880s, is typical of buildings that once lined both sides of St. Paul Street. Its Richardsonian Romanesque style is accented with groups of round-arched windows on the upper levels and heavy carved stone piers on the lower levels.

On the same side of the street, the **Edwards Building (21)** (26-34 St. Paul Street) shows the Chicago Commercial style of architecture. Built in 1912-13 as the headquarters of the E. W. Edwards and Son department store, the decorative white terra cotta exterior features a distinctive diamond-etched pattern and a bold handsome cornice.



**Granite Building circa 1898**

*Continue walking south on St. Paul Street until you come to the corner of St. Paul and Main Streets. On your left, (east) is the Granite Building (124-130 E. Main Street).*

Constructed in 1893-94 for the Sibley, Lindsay and Curr Company's retail store and office, the 12-story **Granite Building, (22)** designed by J. Foster Warner, is Rochester's best surviving example of the Beaux Arts style of architecture. Constructed of granite and cream-color brick, the exterior is highlighted by monumental Corinthian columns, arcaded windows, and terra cotta details. A fire in 1904, often called the worst in the city's history, destroyed the entire block, leaving only this building's hollow shell. Sibley's relocated and the interior of the Granite Building was rebuilt for office and commercial use. In 1984-85, the structure was carefully restored to its original 19<sup>th</sup>-century appearance.

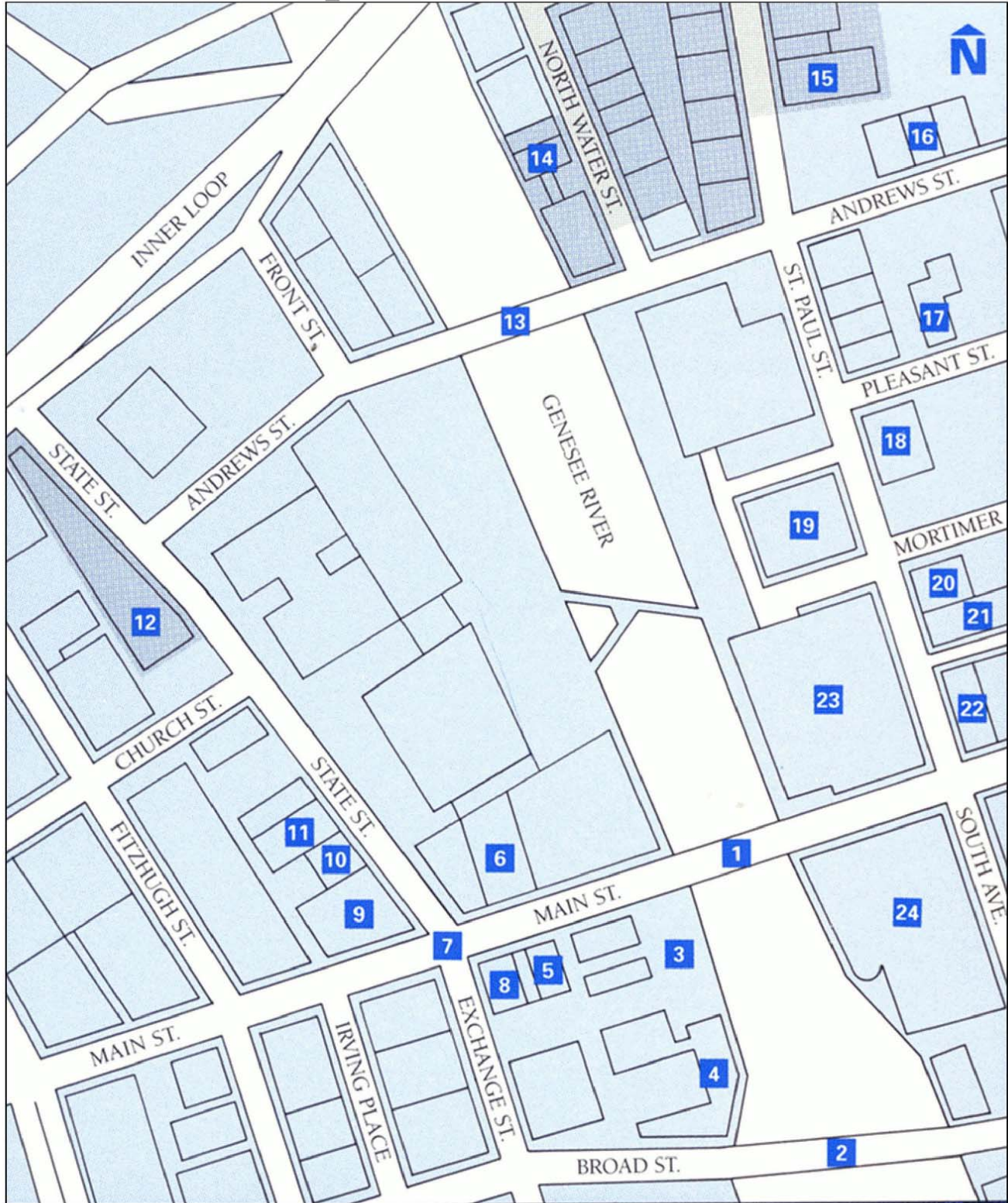
*You are now back at E. Main Street, directly across from Rochester's Riverside Convention Center. (At this point, St. Paul Street changes its name to South Avenue).*



**Rochester Riverside Convention Center**

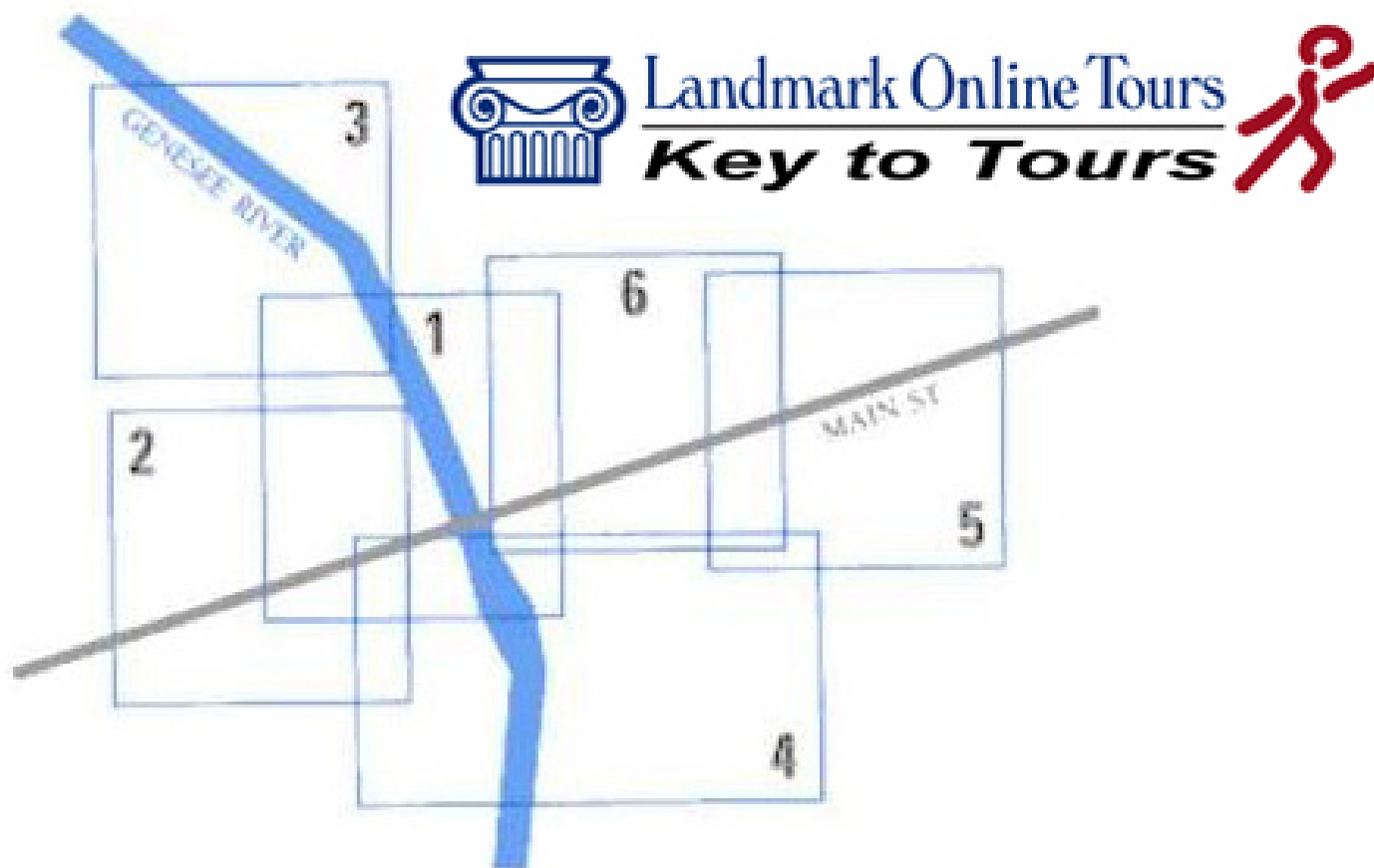
African Americans always have been a part of Rochester. Austin Steward former slave, abolitionist, orator, writer and Rochester's first black businessman, arrived in 1817. His bust is on display in the hotel (120 E. Main Street) that is now on the **site that once was Steward's dry goods store (23).**

The **Riverside Convention Center (24)**, designed by James Stewart Polshek and Partners of New York, was constructed in 1982-85.



*This tour is a 4/5 of a mile loop.*

# Walking Tours of Downtown Rochester



Landmark Online Tours  
**Key to Tours**



1. Central City Tour
2. Hundred Acre Tract Tour
3. High Falls-Brown's Race Historic District Tour
4. The Southern Gateways Tour
5. East End and Cultural District Tour
6. Liberty Pole and City East Loop Tour



The  
Landmark Society  
of Western New York

133 South Fitzhugh St./Rochester, NY 14608-2204

[www.landmarksociety.org](http://www.landmarksociety.org)