

Harnessing the Power of the Genesee River

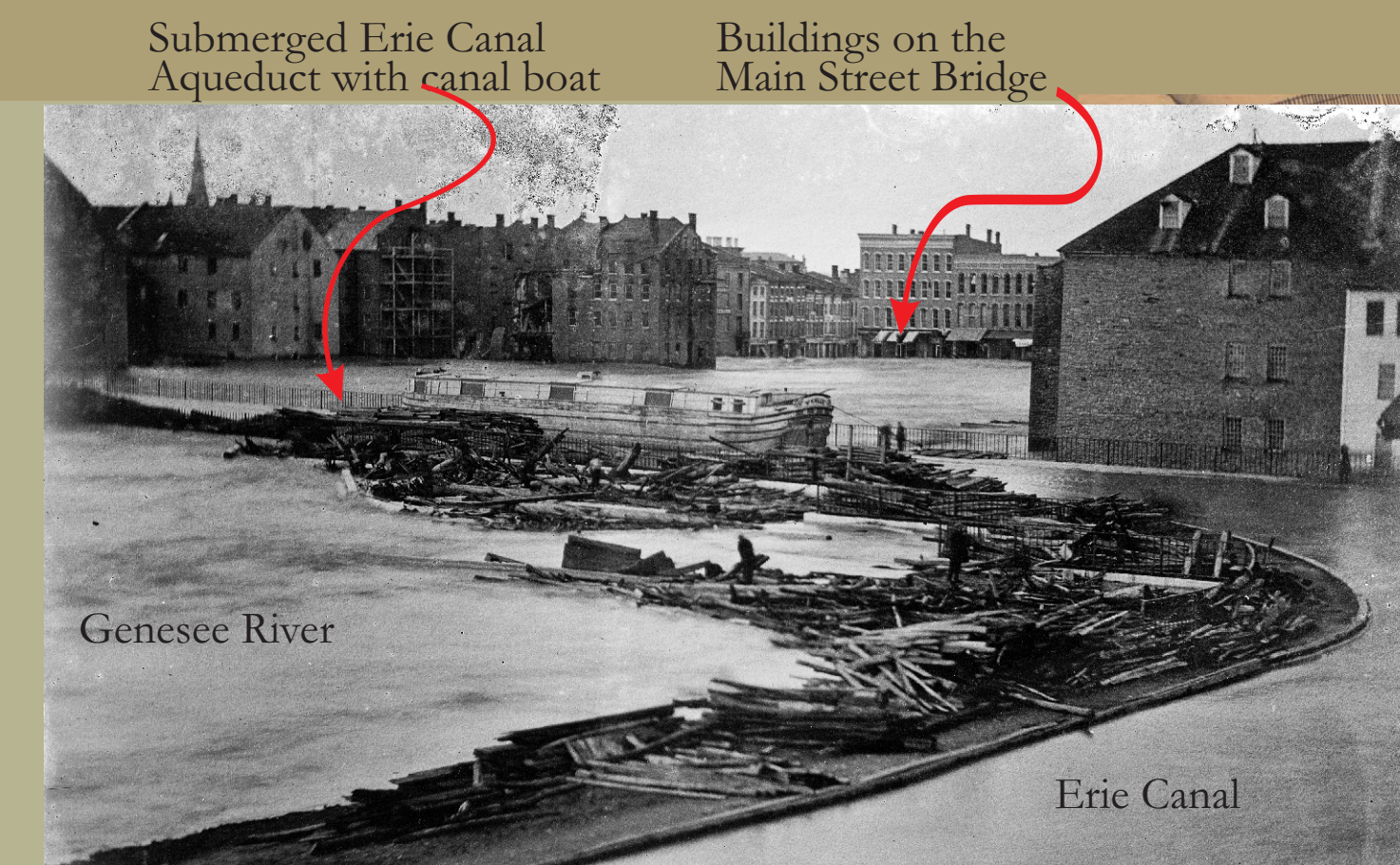
The power of moving water can be both constructive and destructive

Elisha Johnson built the Johnson and Seymour dam in 1817, blasting rock from the site in celebration of the village's first 4th of July.

The dam directed water to raceways on both sides of the Genesee River to provide water power to mills. In the late 19th century, electricity, generated by water power, allowed industries to move away from the river's banks.

The last boat crossed the Erie Canal aqueduct in 1919. The canal was rerouted south of the city through Genesee Valley Park.

The dam was reconstructed to raise the water level of the river, allowing the Genesee to serve as a spur of the Erie Canal, now part of the new Barge Canal System. Boats came to the riverside docks until the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the late 1950s.

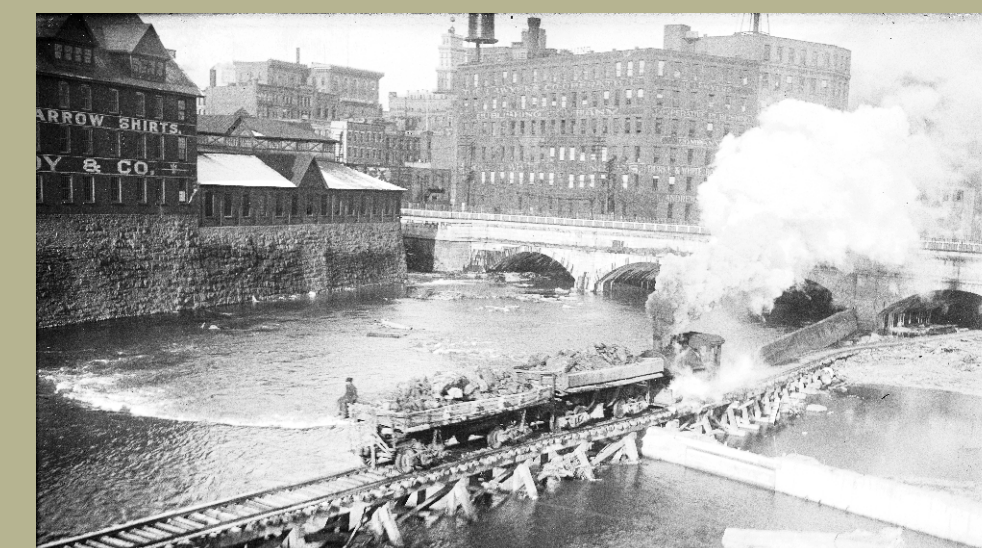


1865 Flood

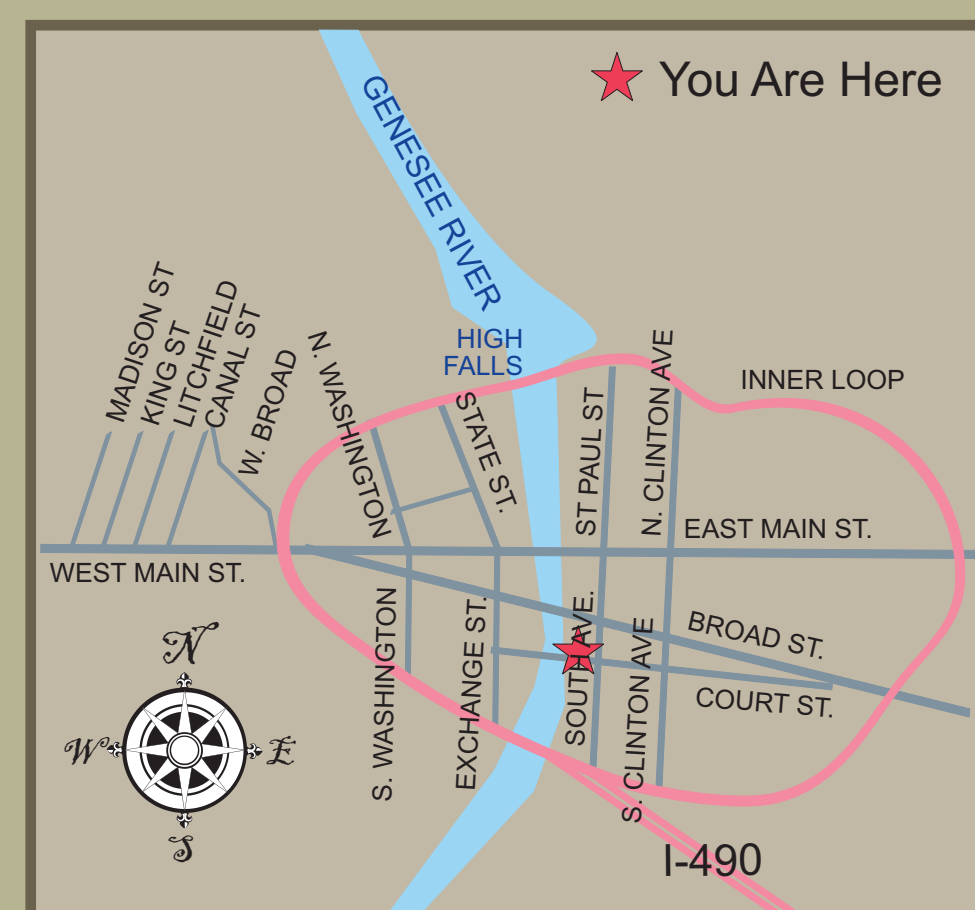
The worst flood in Rochester's history occurred in the Spring of 1865 when 54,000 cubic feet per second rushed through the city, battering the buildings on the Main Street Bridge with trees that had been ripped from the riverbanks south of the city. The Erie and Genesee Valley Canals carried flood waters throughout the city. Water receded after three days.

River Deepening

After the flood of 1865, officials studied the entire Genesee River watershed. Two river deepening projects in the teens and 1930s allowed the Genesee to carry high seasonal waters through the city with less threat of flooding. Flood retaining walls gave further protection to the city. Finally, in 1951 the Mt. Morris Dam, sixty miles south of the city, harnessed the river behind seventeen miles of natural canyon.

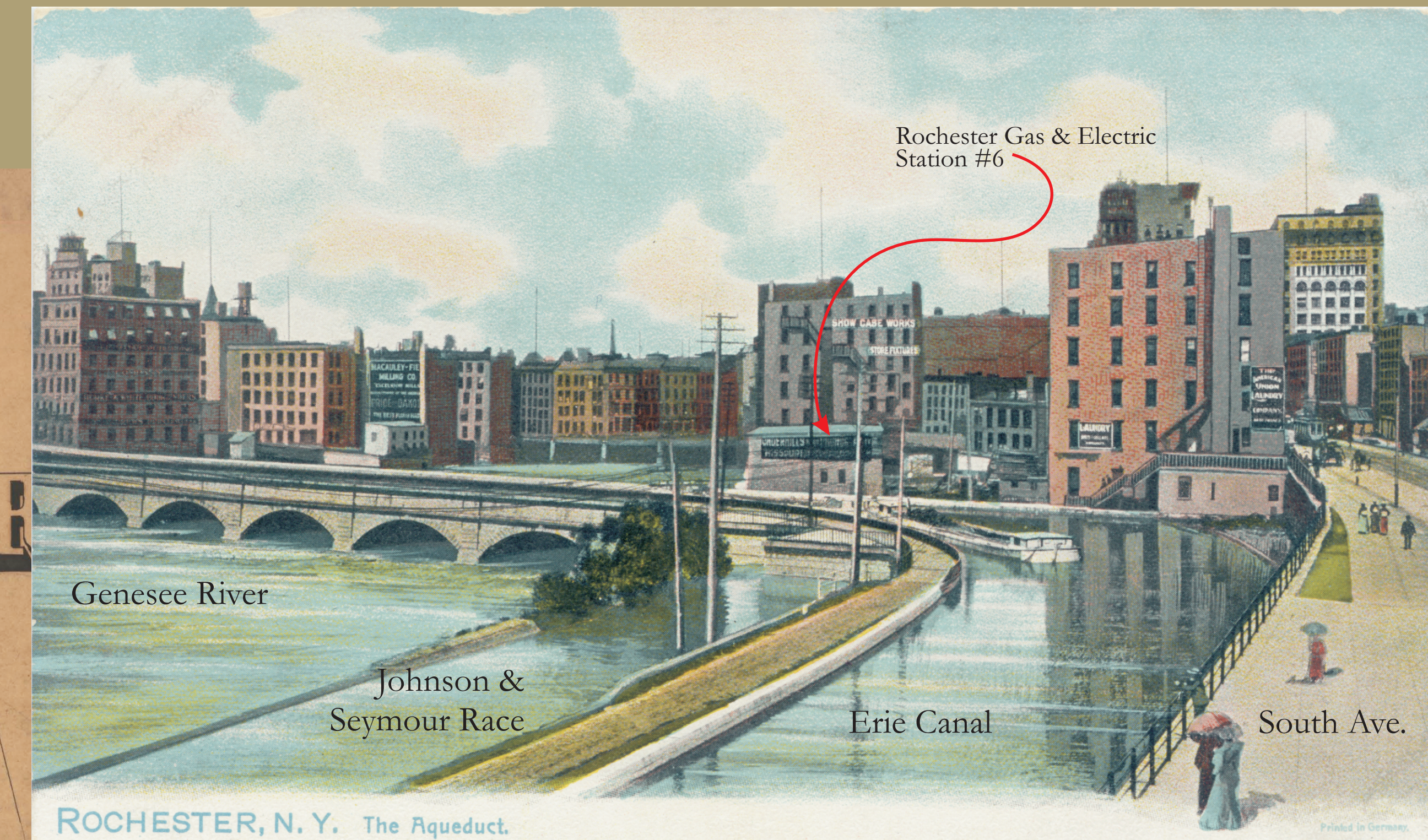


During the 1915 river deepening project stone is removed from the floor of the river near the Erie Canal aqueduct to allow more water to pass through the city without flooding. From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center



Below: Pre-1842 map courtesy of Canal Society of New York State

Left: Flood of 1865 From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center

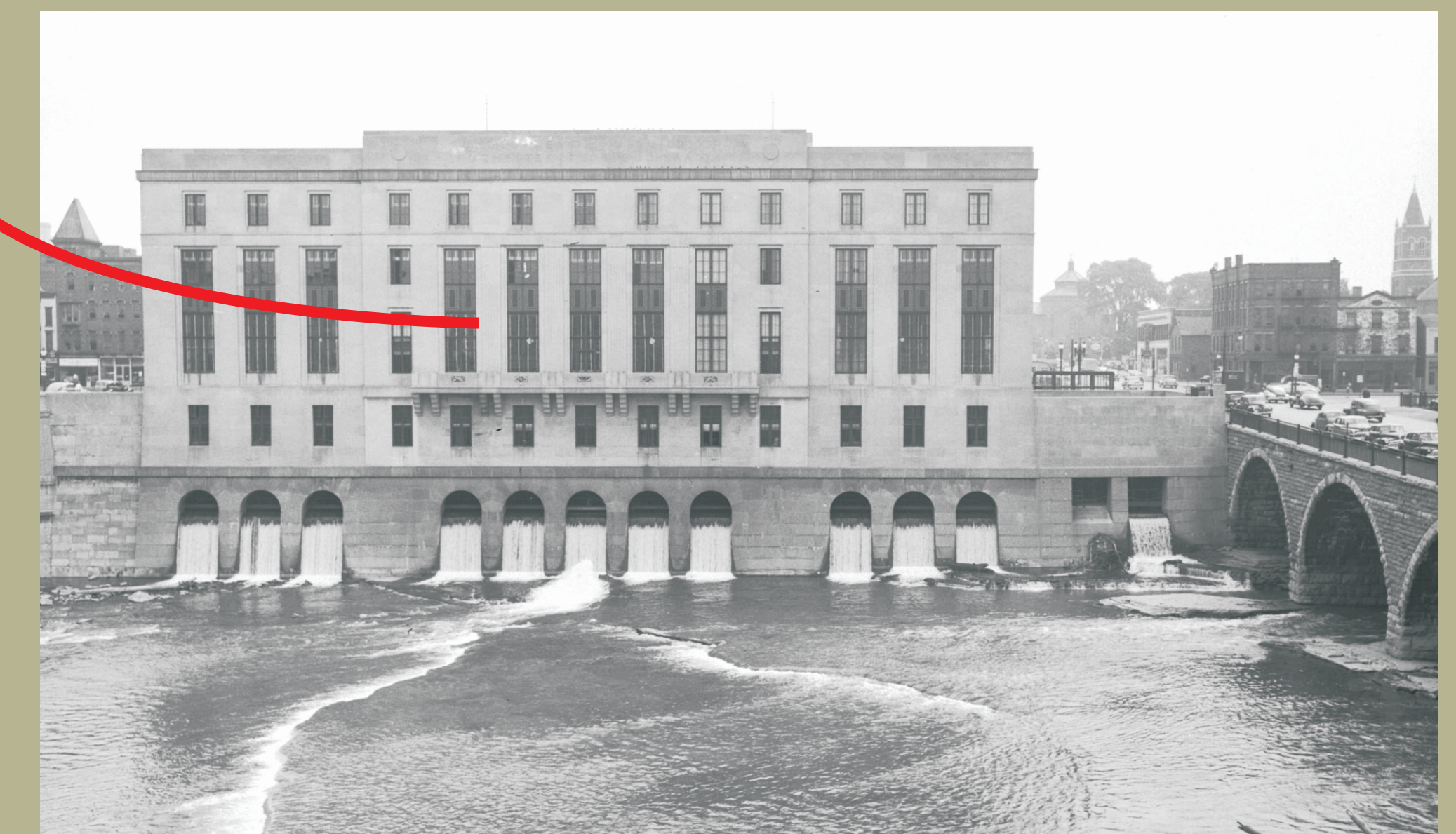


ROCHESTER, N. Y. The Aqueduct.

Left: Dotted red lines on map show location of the Rundel Memorial Building (public library) built in 1934.

Left: Johnson & Seymour Dam (Court Street Dam) is marked with a dotted blue line on the map. The "Mill Canals" are the Johnson & Seymour Race on the east side and the Rochester, Fitzhugh and Carroll on the west.

Above: On the site of the public library in the Rundel Memorial Building, people stroll along South Avenue, once called South St. Paul Street, in this early 20th century post card. Rochester Images: From the Collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division



Above: This 1949 view of the back of the public library shows where water from the Johnson & Seymour Race overflows from under the building on its return to the river. The building was cooled by the water power of this Raceway. Rochester Images: From the Collection of the Rochester Municipal Archives