

58. The Inlet (known as the Rhine) in 1895. The three homes are those of Dido Stephens, Sandy Gardner, and John Oatman.

Another neighborhood grew up south of State Street, around Taber, Fulton, Brindley streets and what is now Floral Avenue. The houses in this area were clapboard, two-story residences, more substantial than the squatter dwellings, although they lacked indoor plumbing or electricity.

Surrounding the Inlet were swamps where the malaria-carrying mosquito bred. Typhoid carriers urinated into the water that others drank. In addition, many residents had tuberculosis, which they transmitted to others by coughing or kissing. Considered to be unhealthy thieves and murderers, the Inlet people were shunned by the townspeople. Fearing for their lives and their health, men, women, and children crossed the Inlet with their hearts in their throats and their hands covering their mouths.

The novelist Grace Miller White crossed the Inlet frequently when she was a young girl growing up on her parents' farm on West Hill. One of fourteen children of John and Olivia Miller, Grace was born in 1868. She recalled her family giving milk and eggs to the squatter people and also the fear she felt when she drove in a carriage through the West End. Nevertheless, as an adult she developed a dedicated social conscience, seeking methods to improve the lot of the poor. In 1909 she published the first of her novels, *Tess of the Storm Country*. It was one of five Storm Country novels that centered on Cayuga Lake, Ithaca, the rich or poor, the righteous or lawless people who lived here. Rather than scorning the squatters as most townspeople did, she portrayed



59. Grace Miller White described the lives of the unfortunate "Rhiners" in her novel *Tess of the Storm Country*. Mary Pickford played Tess in an early film version of the story (which, however, was not filmed in Ithaca).

them as having their own code of honor and as being courageous in the face of poverty, supporting themselves by selling fish and berries.

The first page of *Tess* describes the squatters' situation.

An observer would have noticed a sullen look of hatred pass unconsciously over their faces as their eyes lighted on the distant buildings, for the citizens of Ithaca were the enemies of these squatter fishermen and thought that their presence on the outskirts of the town besmirched its fair name. Not only did the summer cottages of the townfolk that bordered the lake look down disdainfully upon their neighbors, the humble shanties of the squatter fishermen, but their owners did all they could to drive the fishermen out of the land. None of the squatters were allowed to have the title of the property upon which their huts stood, yet they clung with death-like tenacity to their homes, holding them through the rights of the squatter-law, which conceded them the use of the land when once they raised a hut upon it. Sterner and sterner the authorities of Ithaca had made the game laws until the fishermen, to get the food upon which they lived, dared only draw their nets by night. In the winter whilst the summer residents were to be found again in the city, Nature herself made harder the lot of these squatters by sealing the lake

with thick ice, but they faced the bitter cold and frozen surroundings with stolid indifference.¹

About their diseased condition, she wrote:

[Frederick] had always been taught by his father and by his mother who feared contagion, that of people in the world, the squatters must be avoided; they had no hearts; they killed men and broke the laws simply for their own gain. [p. 37]

Their lawlessness is described in one scene by a prosecuting attorney who tells a jury:

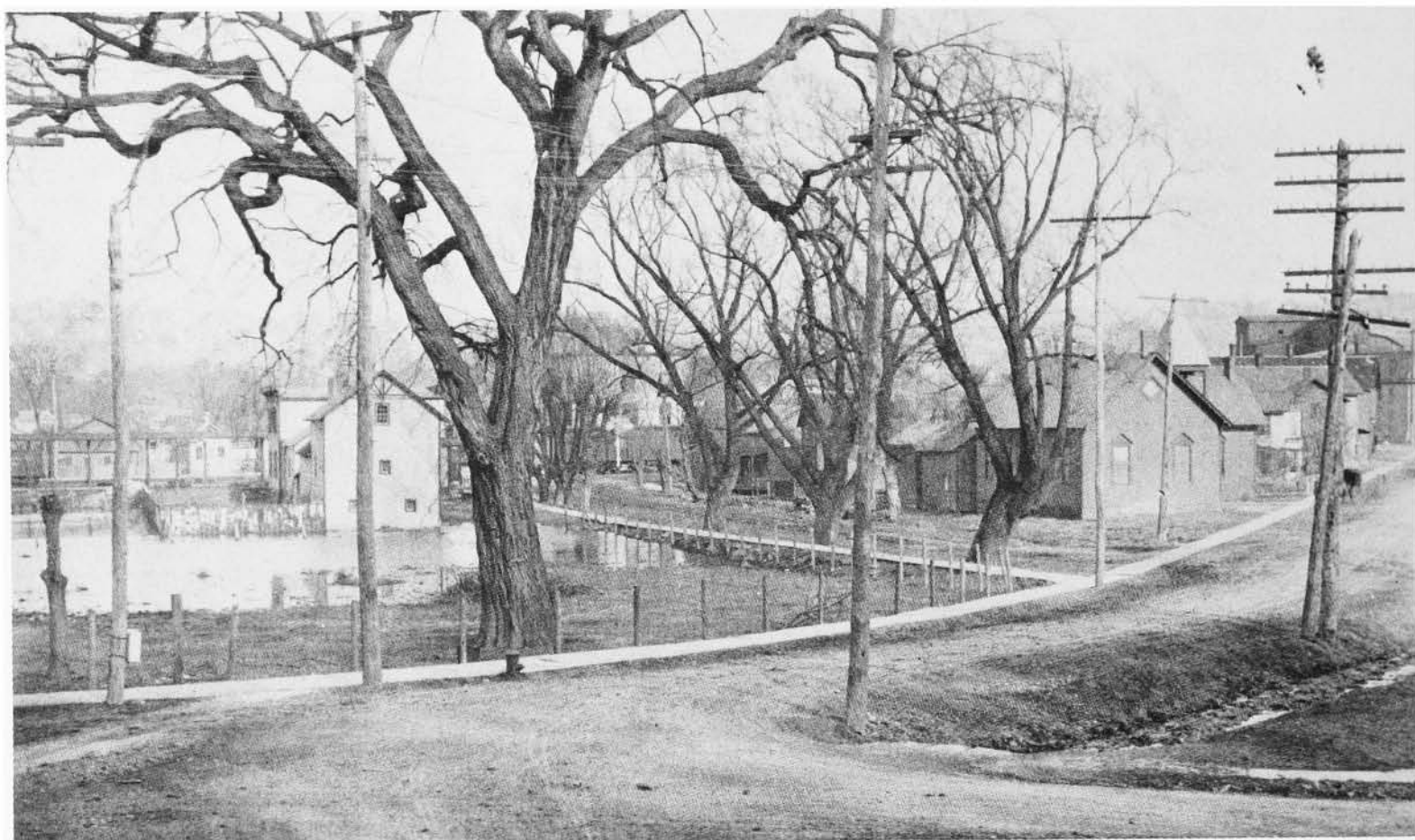
These people have infested our beautiful city, sapping its life like a great pest. The law is nothing to them—human life less. There is one thing of which they stand in awe and it is in your hands to give them one more lesson. That one thing they fear is—the rope. [p. 82]

Although White depicted Ithaca society as rather heartless, some Ithacans did care about the squatters and did minister to the poor. The Williams family cared. They lived above the Inlet in their Gothic Revival stone house known as Cliff Park. The estate, which was the home of Josiah Butler Williams, was located between Elm and Hector streets. With his brothers Timothy and Manwell, Josiah operated a line of canal boats, acted as middleman in the purchase and sale of goods, and conducted a store and a bank. The Williamses probably gave work to a number of Inlet dwellers. Devoted Presbyterians, sober practicing Christians, the Williams family gave clothing, food, and in January 1883, land for the construction of the Inlet Mission.

Elizabeth W. Beebe

Another person who cared was Elizabeth W. Beebe, who devoted her life to caring for the poor and sick around the Inlet and became known as the city missionary. Born in Canada in 1843, Mrs. Beebe settled in Ithaca with her husband, Lyman. Because of marital problems she had to support herself, and she chose to do so by serving the poor. Her small salary was paid with contributions from the local churches.

In September 1882, representatives of the State Street Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Congregational, and First Methodist churches met to discuss the construction of a chapel to serve the Inlet people. Incorporating themselves as the Inlet Mission, they defined their purpose as "teaching . . . Christianity and promoting Christian work in the vicinity of the Inlet in Ithaca."² Located on lower Cliff Street and costing about \$1,000, the building was completed in November 1883. Four years later, coal and horsesheds, an outhouse, and a sidewalk were added to the property. Mrs. Beebe not only conducted non-denominational services in the chapel, she also continued her personal care for the needy. Ithacans remembered her sitting straight-backed in the livery



60. Standing water near the old Beebe Mission on West State Street, ca. 1910. West End flooding problems led ultimately to the construction of the flood control channel in the late 1960s.

wagon as she stopped at one house and then another. By 1904, however, she was physically exhausted. Even her horse was ill and needed a rest. A grateful and appreciative community collected a large purse, which was presented to her at a testimonial dinner. In thanking the donors she said, "It is all like a beautiful dream and the best of it is it is not a dream but reality. Nothing can rob me of it."³

After a year's respite in Canada, she returned to work in Ithaca; but in March 1905, at the age of sixty-two, she died of pneumonia. She was deservedly eulogized as a person who never complained of her lack of strength or of being overworked; she belonged to no one church but to all.⁴ One eulogy, however, significantly recognized the persistence of class divisions in Ithaca: "Those who could tell the real story of her life are not in these pews. Her life was given to that class of people who do not frequent our churches. Her life was similar to the life of her Master who gave his life for the poorest and vilest."⁵

Following Mrs. Beebe's death, the Inlet Mission was renamed the Inlet Beebe Mission. Around 1916 it was renovated under the direction of the Ithaca architectural firm of Gibb and Waltz, who donated their services. In 1932 a completely new chapel was constructed near the old one on land donated by Miss Augusta Williams, the daughter of Josiah Butler Williams. Designed by Henry Calder Thorne and built by Andrew H. McPherson Construction Company, it



61. Interior of the Inlet Beebe Mission in the 1920s.

cost about \$32,000. The trustees sold the older building and adjoining lot for \$20,000 and raised the remainder of the cost. At this time the Episcopalians joined the other local churches in supporting the Mission. The opening service in the new building was held on February 14, 1932. R. C. Osborn, an Ithaca merchant serving on the board of trustees at this time, later recalled that the Mission "had a tremendous influence down there among a mighty tough element."⁶ The Inlet section was ill-smelling and its inhabitants led a catch-as-catch-can existence.

The 1903 Typhoid Epidemic

In 1903 a severe typhoid epidemic struck Ithaca. At first, many people were misdiagnosed as having the grippe. Before long, however, the true nature of the epidemic became apparent. During the first three months, 1,350 of the city's 13,156 residents were infected and eighty-two died. Eventually, 522 homes in all were quarantined. Bewildered and overwhelmed, the Common Council hired Dr. George A. Soper, a sanitary expert, to lead the fight against the disease. Because typhoid spreads by contact with water or food contaminated by the wastes of previous victims, Dr. Soper's strategy consisted of testing the city's 1,300 wells and cleaning out its 1,300 privies, whose contents were spread on open land outside the city.⁷

To control the transmittal of disease within the city, Common Council

sometimes resorted to legal action. When the sewer line was connected to Cliff Street in 1913, there were 200 privies. By 1915, after Common Council had undertaken condemnation proceedings against the owners, there were seventy-five. When the council learned of a diseased individual wandering the streets, it directed the health officer to place him in the County Home. When a Cliff Street family became infected with typhoid and the source of the infection was traced to a break in the Hector Street sewer line, the family appealed to the council to pay their \$378 doctor bill. It did.⁸

While some Ithaca residents continued to shun the Inlet dwellers, others were touched by the statistics that demonstrated how unhealthy an area the Inlet was. A survey of health conditions, written in 1914, stated that, during the typhoid epidemic, the Inlet area had 36 percent of the city's wells, 46 percent of the privies, and 41 percent of the typhoid cases. Furthermore, it had 28 percent of the city's tuberculosis cases.⁹ The drastic measures taken to empty the privies, to improve the city water system, and to discourage the use of wells improved living conditions on the Inlet considerably. In 1914 construction measures undertaken to stem the periodic flooding of the Inlet supplemented the sanitation effort. The Inlet was dredged, low areas were filled in, and the course of the creeks was redirected by shoring their banks.

The Social Service League and West Side House

The Inlet people, however, still needed encouragement to improve their social and economic situation. To provide that encouragement, members of the Williams, Wyckoff, Rothschild, and Livermore families incorporated the Social Service League in 1904. The league was an educational organization seeking to be a good neighbor and offering to help young people and adults with training in sewing, cooking, carpentry, gardening, and industrial arts. Part of the settlement house movement in the United States, the Social Service League also wanted to encourage upward mobility:

One of the strongest convictions which we hold as Americans is that the path of opportunity which we as a people have pursued toward a better and fuller life shall be kept open for coming generations. One of the most essential forms of opportunity without which other forms are incomplete is for a well-rounded social life made up of varied social experiences and realized through the give and take of group activity.¹⁰

The courses and clubs organized by the league first met at 801 West State Street. Later, they moved to the West Side House, which was constructed near the Inlet in 1918 with funds given by E. S. Turner, Jr. on land donated by the Williams family. West Side House was designed by Gibb and Waltz in the half-timbered Tudoresque style. When a model of the West End built by David Fogel was unveiled in May 1986, some of the former residents viewed it with great interest. The little buildings stirred memories. In a reminiscence pub-



62. A settlement house was established by the Social Service League for the West Side community in 1904. This handsome building was designed by Arthur N. Gibb in 1919 and provided social, educational, and recreational facilities for the neighborhood until it was demolished in 1967.

lished in the *Ithaca Journal*, David Drumheller described the West Side House from "top to bottom." There was a complete woodshop, a kitchen for teaching home economics, a weight room, a shower room, a ping pong and pool room.¹¹ Over the years, the house was the meeting place for youth clubs with such names as Little Giants, Imperials, Peerless, Central Tigers, and Tattlers. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, and the Home Bureau also met there. Like the Inlet Beebe Mission, West Side House became a community anchor. Pamela Hayward recalled, "There were crafts and gymnastics. We played baseball and football out on the fields and there were dances at night for the older children." Stella Kowalski remembered receiving her first doll at West Side House. Her sister received a doll too.¹²

After World War I, the activity on the Inlet changed from commercial to recreational. Few barges entered the Inlet to load or unload; most of the commercial transportation was now provided by the railroads. The city undertook an Inlet beautification campaign. In the summer of 1925, the eight remaining squatters, including two families and an aged couple, were moved to houses on Floral Avenue. Their shacks were described in a newspaper article as "measly insignificant specimens of sheltering places boarded up with packing box lumber and strips of tar paper over the cracks to keep out the wind and weather." But "to [the squatters] they meant home."¹³ Thus ended the life of the squatter community along the Inlet.

The Demolition of a Neighborhood

The Inlet neighborhood south of State Street survived another forty years, but after the flood of 1935, its existence became provisional. The summer of 1935 had been unusually hot and dry. On July 7 the heavens opened in a violent rainstorm that dropped seven inches on the city and the surrounding hills in twenty-four hours. Water cascaded into the Inlet from all the creeks. Jammed by debris that clogged the curving stream, flood waters inundated the West End. So extensive was the damage caused by this storm that the need for some kind of flood control became obvious. West End residents and Common Council members began to talk seriously about a major project to control the flooding by straightening the Inlet. But thirty years passed before the dredges of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began to pump Inlet muck onto the former railroad yards.

Although the flood control project had been under consideration for many years, the apparent increase in West End property values during the late 1950s spurred it to finalization. It was included in the Federal Flood Control Act of 1960, but because of political maneuvering was not funded until 1964. Work began in November of that year.

The construction plan was divided into three stages:

Stage I consisted of deepening and widening the channel downstream of Cascadilla Creek.

Stage II provided for increased channel capacity through restricted areas where appreciable flood damage occurred, the construction of a ninety-four-foot-span railroad bridge, and a concrete drop structure (energy dissipator) that would also provide a fishway for fish that spawn in the Inlet.

Stage III consisted of channel realignment and deepening and widening the channel from the vicinity of the intersection of Spencer Avenue and Elmira Road to the vicinity of Cascadilla Creek, a distance of about two and one-half miles.

While the dredges began work, the property owners and tenants on Taber, Cherry, Brindley, and West Buffalo streets watched and wondered what would happen to them. In August 1964 a public meeting was held to inform property owners about city and state acquisition procedures; the actual purchase of property, however, did not begin until two years later. First, the state had to prepare what are known as Taking Maps. They included a survey, a verbal description of each site, and ended with this statement:

An easement is deemed necessary by the Superintendent of Public Works to be acquired by appropriation in the name of the People of the State of New York for purposes connected with the Ithaca Flood Protection Project, Cayuga Inlet, pursuant to the Flood Control Law being Chapter 862, Laws of 1936 as amended.¹⁴

In all, 185 parcels of land had to be obtained by the city and state. The city allotted \$100,000 for the purchase of thirty-five properties east of Floral Ave-



63. Demolition of the Inlet Beebe Mission, 1967.

nue, including fifteen houses and twenty lots. The purchase of the railroad property was also included in this appropriation. Operating from a relocation office in the former Scotchbrand Gas Station, 1014 West State Street, the state purchased forty-nine properties within the city limits. Plagued by delays, the project caused justifiable anger and anxiety. Some people saw it as a "conspiracy between the state and the city to get rid of Floral Avenue's dilapidated houses."¹⁵ Elderly tenants did not want to go into institutional housing but worried about paying higher rent for another apartment. Many people could not make plans until they received payment for their property, and others complained about the prices they received when they finally were paid.

After May 1968, only a few of the Inlet homes remained. Thirty-one houses, two barns, and thirty-seven garages were razed in fire training exercises. Every fire company in the county participated. The Beebe Chapel and the West Side House had also been demolished.

Over the site of Beebe Chapel and the West Side House, the state erected a \$600,000 bridge. At the time of its demolition, the chapel was leased to the Cerebral Palsy Association. The churches who were co-owners of the building received \$93,000 from the state for the property. After debating whether to keep their share of the proceeds or to pool it for purposes similar to those of the chapel, they decided to use the money to fund a day-care center (to be housed at the Presbyterian Church) and to support a mobile ministry similar to that of Elizabeth Beebe. Although the latter project did not succeed, the day-care center has flourished and has even expanded. Area Congregations Together (ACT) is an organizational legacy of the chapel funds. One of its important projects is the collection and distribution of food from the Kitchen Cupboard.



64. Houses on West Court Street, 1967 (above). The same houses being demolished (below). Photographs by Robert Hedges, courtesy of Robert Hedges.

Another legacy of the old West End neighborhood is administered by the Social Service League. With the interest from the proceeds of the sale of West Side House and, later, Northside House, the league makes grants to deserving

community agencies that provide needed services and counseling to the public.

When the Cayuga Inlet local flood protection project was completed in 1970, it was considered one of the better examples of environmental engineering, because conservation, recreation, and environmental management had all been considered, evaluated, and incorporated into the program. Not only was the Inlet redesigned for flood control, a fishway was constructed in the interest of conservation; the main channel was aligned to allow a three-lane 2,000 meter Olympic rowing course, and the material excavated from the channel, normally wasted in such projects, was used to advantage as landfill for both a city and state park. The Ithaca Garden Club participated in the project by undertaking a fund-raising campaign to plant crab apple trees along the banks of the new channel. Under the direction of Mrs. Richard Barnes and Mrs. Joseph Daino, Ithacans gave trees in memory of loved ones, while the Garden Club gave fifty trees in memory of the club's founder, Mrs. Livingston (Daisy) Farrand. Planted by nurseryman Phil White, they were given to the care of the city on May 17, 1974.

As successful as the flood control project was in eliminating the Inlet's floods and enhancing Ithaca's natural and recreational environments, it also left the city with one new major problem—the confusing and frustrating intersection that Ithacans call the “Octopus.” In the original plans for the flood control project, the state agreed to build one bridge over the channel, and it did. The city was expected to build the second bridge carrying Taughannock Boulevard over the channel, but it did not. Therefore, twenty-four years later the five-road intersection at the only bridge continues to be an unresolved traffic problem.

The construction of the second bridge has been a matter of contention since the flood control project began. In 1965 and 1966 the state and the Army Corps of Engineers continually pressured the city to begin construction on the second bridge. They even threatened to suspend work. The city government, however, wanted the second bridge constructed by the state as a phase of the realignment of Route 96. The cost of this second bridge was estimated at \$423,000, which the city did not want to pay.¹⁶ Instead, Superintendent of Public Works Robert Dingman conceived an alternative route that cost only \$100,000 and was finally accepted by Common Council and the state. That route was Park Road, which now intersects Cliff Street just across the bridge and continues northward to Cass Park and Route 89.

At the time Park Road was constructed, City Planner Tom Niederkorn asked that it be considered only temporary and be identified as a park road, not as a highway. He worried that this connection might carry traffic indefinitely and so give the state an excuse for not building the Route 96 interchange.¹⁷ Twenty years later, Park Road is still an unsatisfactory substitute for the second bridge.

Like a smoldering fire that every so often bursts into flame, the public discussion of a solution to the Octopus intermittently erupts into heated debate and then subsides. Common Council pressures the state to do something. The state, in turn, wants Council to recommend solutions. To date, four alter-



65. Aerial view of the recently completed State Street Bridge and the beginning of the flood control channel, 1967. U.S. Army photograph.

natives for routing traffic over the Inlet and the flood control channel have been presented to the public, but the debate actually centers around two basic alternatives: a low-impact, low-cost solution involving a second bridge at grade paralleling the present bridge, or a high-impact high-cost elevated highway over the railroad tracks and over both bodies of water.

Another debate concerns the future of what is called the island, that piece of land bordered on the south and east by the Inlet and on the west by the flood control channel. The northern tip of the island could be a prime site for development. The land could become an Inlet village of townhouses and shops. Some Ithacans, however, oppose any development there; they wish to make the island the permanent site of the Farmers' Market. Others, including the nearby businessmen, want the market to relocate and the site prepared for development. No decision about the future of the island is likely, however, until the problem of traffic through it or over it is resolved. In the meanwhile, the Farmers' Market has moved to a new location on the Inlet, at Steamboat Landing.

8 West Hill

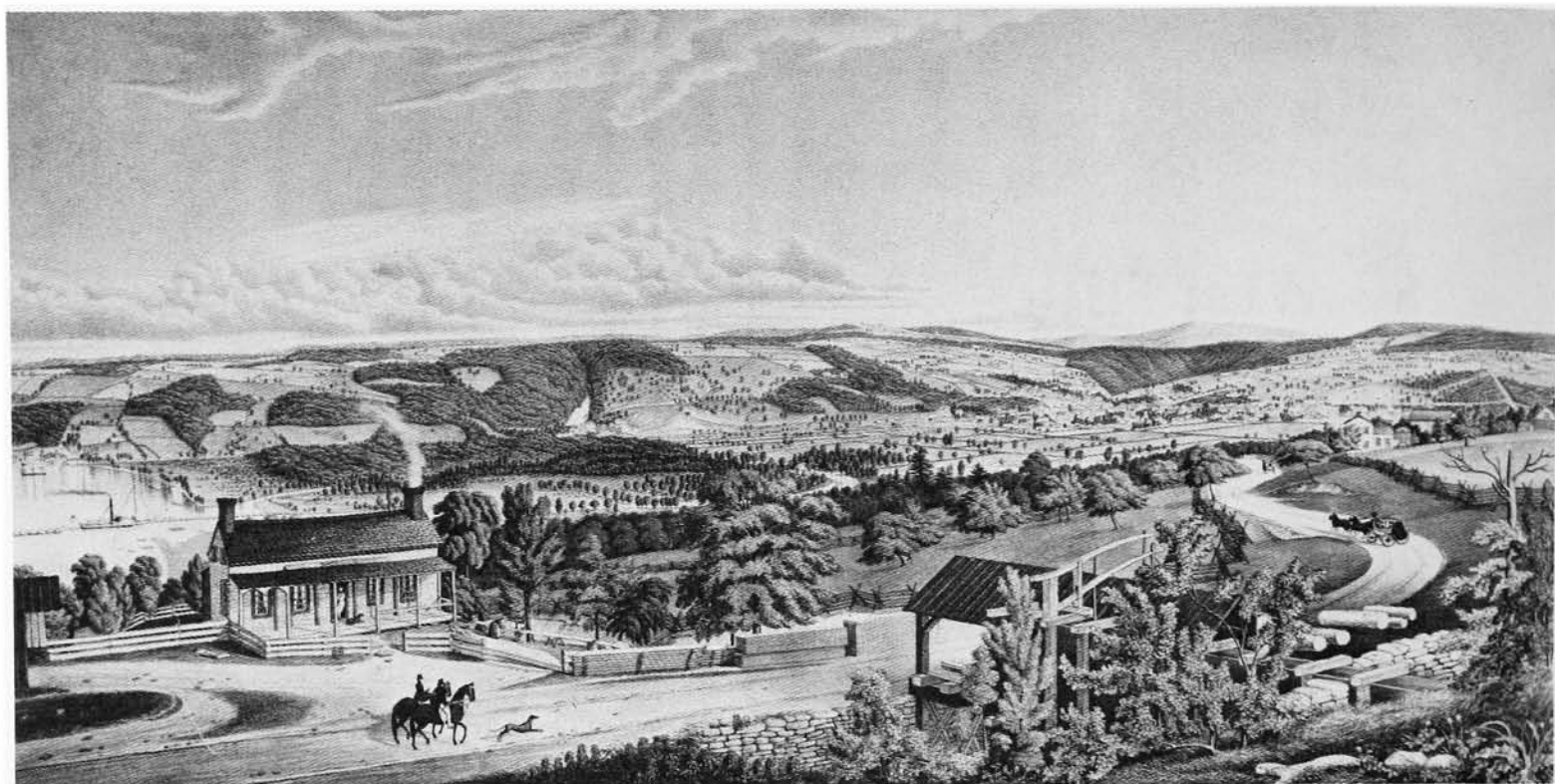
Brad Edmondson

The topography of the Finger Lakes region, formed when glaciers scoured and deepened the shallow valleys of southward-flowing streams, determined much of the development of the future city of Ithaca. On the west side of the lake, the height of land between Cayuga and Seneca lakes is a plateau with long ridge summits. Because it is relatively narrow, this land area has fewer streams and water sources than do other sections of the city. Since early white settlers sought locations adjacent to water, the lack of major streams held back the settlement of West Hill. Eventually, however, its exceptional views of the rest of Ithaca made it a prime residential area.

The native Americans who inhabited the area kept to stream sites further from the south end of Cayuga Lake in what are now the towns of Ulysses and Enfield. Evidence indicates there was a salt lick at the southwest corner of the lake which attracted both game animals and the natives who followed them. Present-day Route 96 (Cliff Street) follows the major trail of the Cayugas that went between the lakes. After the Revolutionary War, this whole district was divided into lots awarded to veterans. One of the first to arrive was Nathaniel Davenport, who came with his wife and four children from New Jersey in 1791 and settled on Military Lot 87. This lot extended north and west from the corner of the lake and was north of the so-called Bloodgood tract.¹

Nathaniel built a log cabin on a site overlooking the lake, just north of what is now the Ithaca city line. He soon rebuilt it as a larger house of wood and stone and opened a tavern on the site to benefit stagecoaches and travelers on the road to Geneva. Davenport's son, Abram, married Mary Johnson, daughter of another early settler, in 1798, in what is said to be the first wedding performed in Ithaca.² Nathaniel held a number of offices in the early town of Ithaca, including that of "fence watcher." Henry Davenport, another of Nathaniel's sons, kept the tavern until 1837, when he sold it to Myron Ferris.

The Davenport tavern is mentioned in connection with an unfortunate incident that befell Abner Treman, the first settler at Trumansburg. During the winter of 1793–94, Treman had taken his oxen to the end of the lake to feed them on marsh grass. Returning one particularly bitter night, he stopped at Davenport's tavern. The next morning, he set forth on foot in a fresh fall of snow and intense cold. By midnight he had made it only to Weyburn's, near



66. Henry Walton's *View of Ithaca from West Hill*, 1839. The Davenport tavern (known today as the Old Stone Heap) was built about 1825 on the site of two earlier taverns.

Goodwin's Point (at present-day Taughannock Park). He was so frozen he could only cry out. He was heard and brought inside the house there, but one foot was so frostbitten it had to be amputated. This story gives but a slight suggestion of how difficult travel was in the early years—and also how these taverns along the road were safe harbors for those making long journeys.

South of Davenport's, a large part of West Hill was apportioned to the Bloodgood tract. Abraham Bloodgood received a certificate for 1,400 acres west of what is now Tioga Street. These certificates were being distributed by Simeon DeWitt, at the time surveyor general of the state, as part of the Military Tract allotments. DeWitt, who had surveyed and named Ithaca, then bought back this tract on November 1, 1789, and later conveyed part of the acreage to Francis A. Bloodgood, one of Abraham's sons. The portions of the Bloodgood tract on the level land at the end of Cayuga Lake were later divided and sold as building lots.

The real estate boom of 1830 to 1835 had its effect on the properties of West Hill. The Davenport farm was marked off into building lots, along with many other lands in the city. One history relates that lots in the West End (not on West Hill, however) were sold and resold from one day to the next, the prices sometimes doubling overnight. But the bubble burst with the panic of 1837, and West Hill did not become actual building lots until the 1870s.

Most of the lands in the West Hill area pertained to a few large farms and their owners. These properties dated back to grants from the original military tracts. Early maps show Charles Hayt had a farm spread along Hayts Road in



67. Detail from Burleigh's 1873 *Bird's Eye View of Ithaca*.

the town of Ithaca, which backed onto the crest of the West Hill behind what later became the city. Francis Bloodgood divided his tract into lots and sold a few to new settlers. Most of the land was sold as speculative property to nonresident capitalists. John McGraw and Charles M. Titus eventually bought the majority of the Bloodgood tract in 1868. McGraw's farm extended to Humbolt Street (now Floral Avenue) and included forty-eight acres beyond going up the side of West Hill. This area was shown on later maps as the Turner Farm.

A major change in the character of the West End occurred when railroad yards were constructed there in the middle of the nineteenth century. The land along Cayuga Inlet was the only area flat enough and sufficiently undeveloped to accommodate rail yards, freight houses, stations, and coal docks. The route of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western (see Chapter 4) ran alongside the flow of Six Mile Creek into Cayuga Lake. West of the DL&W were the station, yards, and buildings of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, originally built as the Geneva and Ithaca in 1873. The Lehigh Valley owned the wedge of land at the base of Cliff Street, where some of its side tracks and a coal dock were located.

The Bool Floral Company had acquired property and erected greenhouses by 1900. Its property was west of Inlet Creek and up the hill, crossing the



68. View of West Hill from the Cornell Boathouse on the Inlet, ca. 1900.

Chestnut Street Extension and ending up at Elm Street. One might speculate that most people referred to Humbolt Street, which went out past the greenhouses, as the "Bool's Floral Avenue" or later "Floral Avenue," so that this name gradually replaced the original one. Other roads on West Hill have also been known by more than one name. The road that followed the railroad north along the west side of the lake was known as Glenwood Road and only later became Taughannock Boulevard. The other major road on West Hill was the Catskill Turnpike, which had been laid out from Kingston to Bath just after the Revolution. The section of this road situated on West Hill within the city limits became known as Hector Street. It attacked the hill much more directly than it does at present, heading straight up the grade from its intersection with Vinegar Hill.

Although West Hill was slow to develop, by 1874 it had a large enough population to support a grammar school. West Hill School was built in that year and immediately became a focus for the neighborhood, and it continues to be so to this day. It stands in the small triangle formed by Elm and Chestnut streets and Hook Place.

The Expansion of the Neighborhood

The serious development of West Hill as a residential area began at the same time that Ithaca was incorporated as a city, in 1888. Gradually over the next

decades, the large farms of George Hook, Edward G. Wyckoff, Abram Van Order, and others were sold and divided into building lots.

In 1905 Ithaca Realty filed for development of about a dozen lots on a new street ending in a cul-de-sac. The property of George Hook just off Chestnut Street was formed into 106 building lots in 1906. The core of this area became Hook Place. With the city's installation of the West Hill water main in 1908, water became available to future residents. And in 1916 the attractiveness of the neighborhood was further enhanced by the new West Side playgrounds, a gift of Miss Augusta Williams. The playgrounds were a parklike area along West Buffalo Street west of the Leigh Valley Railroad station, between Brindley and Cliff streets. (The former playgrounds are now largely under the waters of the flood control channel.)

City maps of 1922 show that by this year the Van Order farm, which extended from the Inlet to Humbolt Street and beyond, was parceled into some eighty-two lots. In 1908 Edward G. Wyckoff sold his West Hill farm, and in 1909 the Lehigh Valley Railroad sold a triangular parcel along Cliff Street, just to the north of today's Octopus intersection, which became seventeen lots.

Sporadic development continued during the 1920s and 1930s. Leon H. Cass (Cornell '29), who became the Ithaca city engineer in 1933, was especially instrumental in furthering this development. He was responsible for the formation of Cass Park, and most of the West Hill subdivisions were developed under his supervision.³ In 1941 Cayuga Lumber Company developed nine lots along Hook Place between Haller Place and Warren Place.

Life on West Hill, 1900–1940

Ithacans who lived on West Hill between 1900 and 1930 remember a middle-class neighborhood of fewer than one hundred homes surrounded by farms on three sides. On the fourth side, along Cayuga Inlet, were immigrant families, the squatter's community known as "the Rhine," and small manufacturing firms where many hill residents worked. The neighborhood's borders were Hector and Cliff streets to Vinegar Hill Road on the north, and Elm Street on the south. West of Chestnut Street, there were scattered houses along Hook Place.

No grocers or other retailers had shops on the hill, but residents did patronize the surrounding farms. There was a cider mill on Cliff Street, the Sincebaughs' pig farm on Elm Street, a poultry farm outside the city limits on Hector Street, the Hopper dairy farm, the Hook orchard, and truck gardens owned by the Hoppers, Hallers, Crandalls, and others. These farms produced a bounty of fresh local food that was eagerly purchased and preserved by neighborhood families. "This hill is the garden spot of the city because it gets the morning sun," says Herbert L. Van Ostrand, who observed his seventieth year on the 500 block of Elm Street in 1988. "Our crops came in a week to ten days earlier than the crops on East Hill," he says.



69. Porch, gardens, and view from Cliff Park, home of the Williams family. Chestnut Hill Apartments are now located at this site.

For the most part, the West Hill neighborhood in those days was a quiet, ordinary community of working people who went about their business and took an active interest in the affairs of their neighbors. But there was one exception in this generally modest neighborhood: the Josiah Butler Williams estate, Cliff Park, which, until it was demolished by the county in 1964, occupied eighteen acres between Elm and Hector streets, from the base of the hill to west of Chestnut Street. The Williams brothers had made their fortune in banking and shipping in the Ithaca area, and Josiah built Cliff Park in the 1840s. But by the 1920s, every family member except for three unwed sisters had either died or moved away from the family mansion.⁴

Herbert L. Van Ostrand worked for Lottie, Augusta, and Ella Williams from 1926 until the estate was abandoned in 1942. Van Ostrand's father was superintendent of the estate, and the junior Van Ostrand began as the Williamses' chauffeur and then became superintendent when his father died in 1935. After the estate was vacated in 1942, Van Ostrand remained as caretaker until it was razed.

"We'd have a minimum of three and maximum of six men working on the grounds year-round," he recalls. "In the winter, there was plowing, shoveling, and tree trimming to be done. And from April 15 until October, we'd mow every day. We mowed four and a half acres with old-fashioned reel mowers, by

hand. My father was very particular. The place looked like a golf course. . . . The estate was the showplace of the city."

Cliff Park included a formal front garden bordered by English privet hedges. The Williamses were partial to peonies, so Van Ostrand lined the north drive with forty-eight plants of all colors. A total of eighty-three varieties of peony grew on the grounds. After the mansion was torn down, neighborhood residents dug up most of the plantings, and Van Ostrand says that a few Williams peonies still bloom in West Hill yards.

Cliff Park also contained extensive plantings of zinnias, roses, shrubs, and annual flowers. A creek runs through the center of the property, and Van Ostrand saw that it was landscaped with water-loving plants. There were also four tennis courts. Neighborhood residents were allowed to walk through the property, Van Ostrand recalls, although children were scrupulously kept off the lawns. "It was a beautiful park, private but open for all to enjoy, right in the middle of the neighborhood."

Inside, the house had eleven Italian marble fireplaces, six baths, and beautiful woodwork. It was maintained by a handyman, two maids, a cook, and a part-time cleaning woman. In all, as many as eleven employees worked to maintain the house and grounds.

The Williamses were devout Presbyterians, but their generosity was interdenominational. They gave a substantial gift toward the construction of a small Episcopal chapel on Hector Street, and they also supported the West End's Beebe Chapel, which was at the base of the hill and used mostly by families on the Inlet.

Augusta Williams was chief organizer of a Wednesday night prayer meeting for all Protestant women in the neighborhood. Mrs. Van Ostrand, the former Thelma Perrin, remembers a typical gathering: "Grandma Bradford loved to sing, and she would lead a hymn. Then we would take turns presenting a talk about something, one book of the Bible at a time." Afterward there would be tea, biscuits, and local gossip. "Grandma Bradford always baked the cookies. For that matter, she baked bread for the whole neighborhood."

But differences between local residents did occasionally mar the spiritual harmony. Paul Bradford, who was born at 302 Elm Street in 1898, remembers his grandmother saying that at one meeting before World War I the wife of Adolf Wolff (309 Elm Street) began praying in German. "This caused great consternation," he said. "A lot of the women wondered whether God would understand German."

Ethnic and class differences were not pronounced among families on the hill. But Bradford remembers that hill families, who were mostly native-born American citizens, did not socialize with the immigrant families that lived on Humbolt Street, the lower reaches of Cliff Street, and along the Inlet. "I think we saw them as a rougher class of people," he says. "I remember once seeing a man run out the back of a house on Humbolt Street—he was being chased by his wife, who was carrying a teakettle full of hot water. He jumped in the Inlet and swam to the other side until things calmed down at home." Bradford also



70. The Episcopal Chapel at the corner of Hector and Cliff streets.

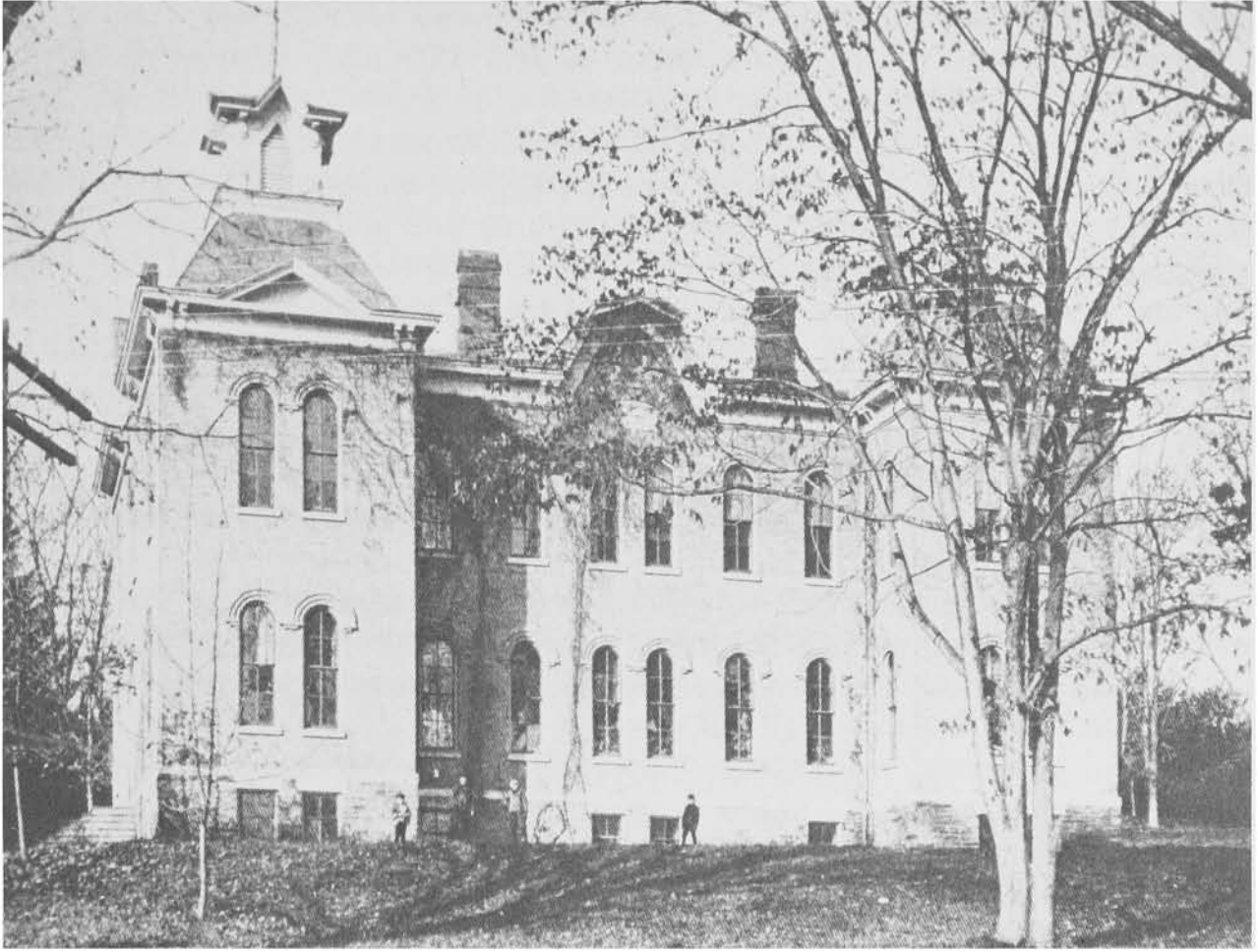
remembers walking past a Humbolt Street whorehouse every day on his West Hill paper route.

The separation between neighborhoods seemed even more apparent when West Hill residents looked at the shantytown called the Silent City on the Inlet. Earl Carpenter of 200 Haller Boulevard remembers that he and a friend would occasionally take a pony ride to the airport, at the present site of the Hangar Theatre on Route 89. The ride went through Silent City. "I remember how scared we were of those guys and their camps," he says. "We'd whip that poor little pony to go faster."

For West Hill children in the days before World War II, West Hill School was the center of social life. In a 1979 letter to local historian Carol Kammen, Paul Bradford reminisced about the days he spent there between 1903 and 1907.

My family lived on the corner of Elm and Chestnut streets, only a block from the school, so it was very convenient, and I started school at five years (of age). The first year I was there, only two or three grades were taught by two teachers, in two downstairs rooms. West Hill was sparsely settled. Next year, a new teacher was added, and grades three, four, and five were in an upstairs room. I only had one teacher there for the four years, Miss Frances White, who taught first grade my first year, then I skipped second grade, and Miss White moved upstairs, where I continued to have her three years more. We had to come downtown to school for sixth grade and after. . . .

In those days, this school had no running water or plumbing in the building.



71. West Hill School, ca. 1903. The four boys (from left) are Paul Bradford, Eugene Bradford, Harold Elmendorf, and Hugh Elmendorf.

There was a pump outside, and the other facilities were in the corners of the grounds. We enjoyed the spacious school grounds, for we had 15 minutes of outdoor recess each morning and afternoon, for playing "duck on a rock," and other games, and when there was snow—"fox and geese."

I never heard of a detention hall in school—I would say discipline was practically perfect, for the pupils in those days respected the teachers or others (in) authority, as a matter of right. I regret to hear of some of the conduct in classrooms now. Sometimes pupils had to stay after school to study their lesson further (there were no buses to be taken), but other punishment was very seldom necessary or used. I do not think that in four years in West Hill School, punishment—like a few slaps on the hand with a short rubber hose, was used more than three or four times altogether. I am eternally grateful that we were taught the basics—spelling, multiplication tables, etc. In sixth or seventh grade, we had spelling bees in the room—sometimes with other rooms in a similar grade. We took regents examinations in all subjects which we had to pass—in seventh grade, spelling and geography, in eighth grade, history, arithmetic and English, and in High School, in every subject, every year . . .⁵

Herbert L. Van Ostrand remembers that in 1918 the school was dominated by a gentle but imposing principal, Mrs. Mary Arnold: "She was a lovely

person, but a disciplinarian. She was both big and tall. Things were as she wanted them. And she had an element to deal with, too. She had some real tough guys from the Inlet. Older kids were still in grade school then, and they could make trouble. But she had a left hand like you wouldn't believe. And after you were through the ordeal, she'd ask you real sweet—"Will you take your seat now?" If you didn't, she'd pick you up and put you in it."

Baseball and football were often played in the schoolyard in those days, Van Ostrand says. In the winter, snow would be banked around the edge of the yard, then the middle was flooded to make a hockey rink. Sledding was also popular, and West Hill's steep streets made perfect runs. "Cars weren't common back then," says Van Ostrand. "I don't think you'd see six cars driving on Hector Street between sundown and sunrise. So it was great for bobsledding. We'd get way up to the top past the egg farm and let go. We'd make it all the way to the State Street Bridge over the Inlet."

"But mainly, we worked," says Paul Bradford. "Almost every kid in my social situation worked. My dad fired the boiler at the Ithaca Sign Works. We didn't starve, but we couldn't save money either and we needed every penny. So as soon as we could, we all got jobs."

Bradford graduated from Cornell in 1918 and moved to New York City, where he was certified as a public accountant in 1923. He then moved back to Ithaca to begin a forty-year career with the Tompkins County Trust Company. As a young boy, however, he worked all over the hill, putting together fruit boxes for the Hook orchard, gardening for the Williamses, and carrying papers for the *Ithaca Journal* between 1907 and 1911. His paper route ran along the length of Chestnut Street, down Hector Street, back up Cliff Street, then along the Inlet and Humbolt Street to Elm Street. It took two hours, served about fifty families, and netted him one dollar a week. In his 1979 letter he described the highlights of the route:

There were a few fringe benefits like delivering "Carriers Greetings" to our customers on New Years Day, and receiving a small hand-out. The "greetings" were an almanac, with pictures of the carrier boys, city officials, etc., and cost us 5 cents each.

On election night, each carrier boy was assigned to an election booth. When the polls closed, and as soon as a tally of the votes was made, (he) rushed to the Journal office, on his bicycle, where the totals for the city were compiled. Extra pay—25 cents.⁶

Van Ostrand inherited Bradford's paper route, but delivering papers was only one of "dozens of jobs" he held all over the city, he says. Indeed, his career culminated in a thirty-year stint with the Ithaca Police Department, and he retired as chief of police in 1972.

One hazard of living on the hill in the early days was runoff from storms. "Used to be that after a rain, Elm Street would turn into a river," says Van Ostrand. "The West Hill Civic Association was first organized in the 1920s to lobby the city for storm sewers. And they did put a few sewers in at that time, but not enough. There was a lot of damage here during the floods of 1935, 1937,

and 1943, with porches torn off and so on. I threatened to sue the city after that third flood if they didn't give us some services. Fortunately they did."

But probably the most dramatic moment in the life of West Hill came on the night of January 10, 1965, when the West Hill School burned. "Everyone in the neighborhood was up," says Van Ostrand. "We all stood around in disbelief." The original building had been replaced by a new school in 1949, but that building closed in the early 1980s during a district reorganization. It reopened almost immediately as the new home of several private schools and day care centers and has housed the Alternate Community Schools, now the exclusive tenant, since 1983.

West Hill Notables

Between 1900 and 1940, West Hill produced or was home to a number of Ithacans who made their mark on the wider world. Hugh Elmendorf, son of a former mayor, gained fame as an armed forces airman. Elmendorf grew up on



72. The Gilkey house, Hector Street, and Vinegar Hill, ca. 1910. At the time this picture was taken, West Hill was still sparsely populated.

Elm Street, was educated in Ithaca public schools and at Cornell, and joined the Army Air Corps in 1921. He became an expert in high altitude pursuit and, before his death in an air crash in 1933, helped design aircraft. Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage, Alaska, a major staging base for flights in the North Pacific, is named for him.⁷

Another notable resident of West Hill was Charles Collingwood, a foreign correspondent for CBS News. Collingwood was born in Three Rivers, Michigan, but his family moved to Elm Street, across from the Elmendorfs, in 1921 or 1922. He attended Deep Springs College and Cornell, graduated from Cornell in 1939, and joined CBS as the war began. Collingwood gained fame as an associate of Edward R. Murrow in London, and he retired from CBS in 1982 after a distinguished career. He died in 1985.⁸

Another distinguished presence in the neighborhood was the Gilkey home at the north corner of Hector Street and Vinegar Hill Road. Members of the Gilkey family were prominent clergymen in Chicago and Boston, and the Ithaca Gilkeys worked with young people. Gladys Gilkey, who lived in the family home before her marriage to Virgil Caulkins, became national secretary of the Girl Scouts of America. Her brother Royal was a biology teacher in Ithaca public schools.

West Hill, 1940–1988

Further development of West Hill took place following World War II, as the city of Ithaca filled in to its western and northern lines. The postwar development of West Hill was marked by a shift toward more rental housing. The neighborhood's only nonresidential building (other than West Hill School), the Army Reserve Center at 101 Sunrise Road, opened in 1958. Other major developments included the Chestnut Hill Apartments at 143 Chestnut Street; West Village, a 235-unit complex at 150 West Village Place that opened in 1972; and the conversion of many formerly single-family, owner-occupied homes into apartments.

Today, little vacant land remains in the West Hill area, and development is filling in the open spaces outside the city limits. Although this neighborhood has grown dramatically since the end of World War II, it has been limited by the rocky, steep hillsides, the winding roads, and the remoteness of some city services, especially fire protection. True, a nearby fire company (Sprague Steamer Company No. 6, at West State Street near Fulton) has been a fixture since the city fire department was first formed, but there has never been a fire company on West Hill itself. Accelerated development up West Hill, especially around the Tompkins Community Hospital and county office complex, has increased calls for such services.

It has also increased the need for a solution to the infamous Octopus intersection, the junction of Floral Avenue (Route 13A) and Routes 89, 96, and 79 at the base of the hill. For the past forty years, as traffic volume has grown, the intersection has had a definite and negative impact on the quality of life for

hill residents. Many residents must share Herbert L. Van Ostrand's concern about accidents: "I always said that the good Lord has been watching out for us ever since they built that Octopus intersection . . . invariably, two to four trucks a year would lose their brakes on Hector Street or Cliff Street and come barreling through there. Practically anything you can load on the back of a truck has been splattered all over that intersection, from lumber to canned peaches. . . . when the Octopus was built, they blocked off an avenue of escape. Before, a truck driver [with no brakes] who knew what he was doing could go straight through from Cliff Street to Floral Avenue. Now he can't."

When interviewed during Ithaca's centennial year, most of the old-timers from West Hill were wistful about the old days. "It was a high-class middle-class neighborhood," said Paul Bradford. "It wasn't rich people, but good people. No rough stuff."

"Everyone kept their place up," said Van Ostrand. "You would never see a run-down home—that just wasn't done."

"We were just like one big family," said Gladys Dunn. She remembers one Depression-era party, a house-raising where "practically everyone showed up to either help or watch." After Gladys's husband Harrison, a descendant of the Davenport settlers, died in 1950, she lived on the hill alone and never locked her door.

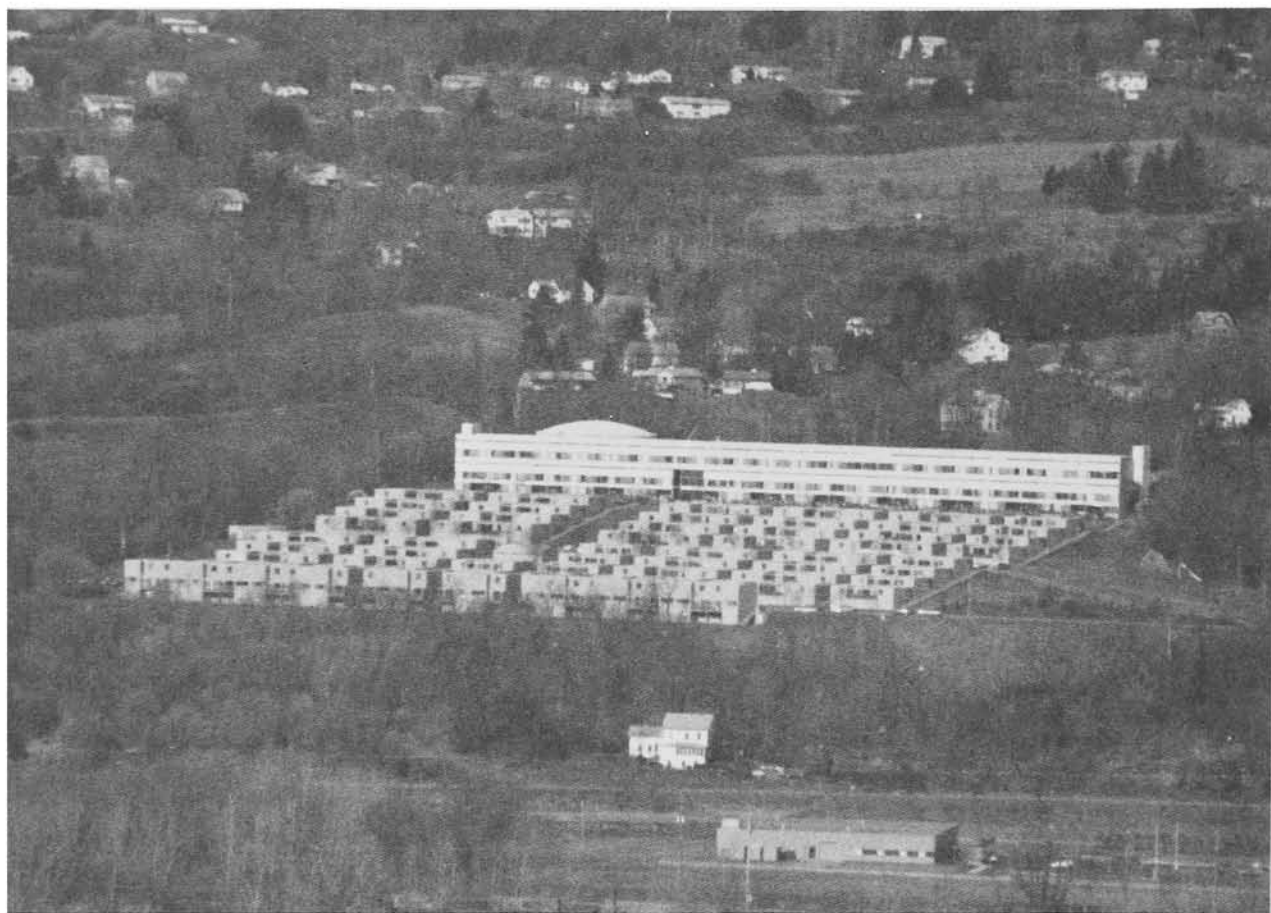
Betty Mott, who in 1988 was living with her husband, Russell, at the old Bradford home at 302 Elm Street, says that the neighborhood has lost much of its neighborliness since the 1940s. The Motts were active in the West Hill Civic Association during the late 1950s, working to defeat a proposal to build a subsidized rental development on Hook Place. Eventually the proposal was defeated in a citywide referendum, but, Mott says, the die was cast.

"We wanted to keep the neighborhood purely residential and owner-occupied," she said. "But that's not the way things are today. People are moving in and out all the time. Nowadays you don't know your neighbors."

Van Ostrand says that when the West Village subsidized housing project opened in 1972, many of his neighbors moved out because they anticipated a slum. "West Village should never have been built," he says. "Things haven't been the same since. But I stayed, and gave it a chance, and I must give Bruce Abbott credit. He runs a tight ship."

Abbott, who has been manager of West Village since it opened, acknowledges that "there was a lot of misunderstanding. We were stuck up here in the corner of the city, far away from any shopping or services, and it was kind of a benign neglect situation for a while." Abbott says that the early years of West Village were difficult because "we took tenants on a first-come, first-served basis, and some people just aren't suited to live in high-density housing. Those people became apparent very quickly, and it was my obligation as manager to see that they either behaved or left."

Lani Peck and her family moved to 516 Chestnut Street, across from the Van Ostrands, in 1976. "I never felt any sense of neighborhood," she says. "All of the support systems you find in neighborhoods had dissipated. No one reached out to us. I missed that feeling. I wanted something better for my kids."



73. West Village as seen from South Hill. The subsidized housing project opened in 1972. Photograph by Clayton W. Smith.

When it was announced that West Hill School was going to be closed, just as her children were getting ready to go there, Peck felt that "this could be the last nail in the coffin for West Hill. So I got involved in the building reuse committee, and Ray Schlather [city alderman] and I literally went door-to-door to sign up people for a civic association." Peck had had no idea that the West Hill Civic Association had been active at least twice before. "It seems to rise again every twenty years," she says. "And I guess it was time again in 1980."

As the centennial year began, Peck said she believes that conditions on West Hill have improved. "We're trying to bring back a sense of pride, and to speak for the neighborhood when we're needed," she said. "We were the first part of the city to set up a neighborhood crime watch program. There are more small get-togethers and parties between neighbors now." Residents are using a new source of low-interest loans from Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services to renovate their homes, and the civic association plans to dedicate a small park in the name of two beloved old-time hill residents, Dr. and Mrs. Laurence McDaniels, between Elm Street and Hook Place.

West Village has also improved, said Abbott: "The police tell me that they receive fewer calls here than anywhere else in the city. We were built to fill a need—quality housing at moderate cost—and I think we've done it. We've found our place in Ithaca."

"There are so many positive aspects to living here," said Peck. "We're not

next to a college, so there isn't a lot of infiltration and noise from students. There's still a wonderful mix of white-collar and blue-collar people. Doctors and lawyers will live around the corner from people of very modest means, and that's a great environment for children.

"But the best thing has been the same forever," she says. "You look out your window and see the whole city below. The farm country is right next door. We have a sense of spaciousness here."

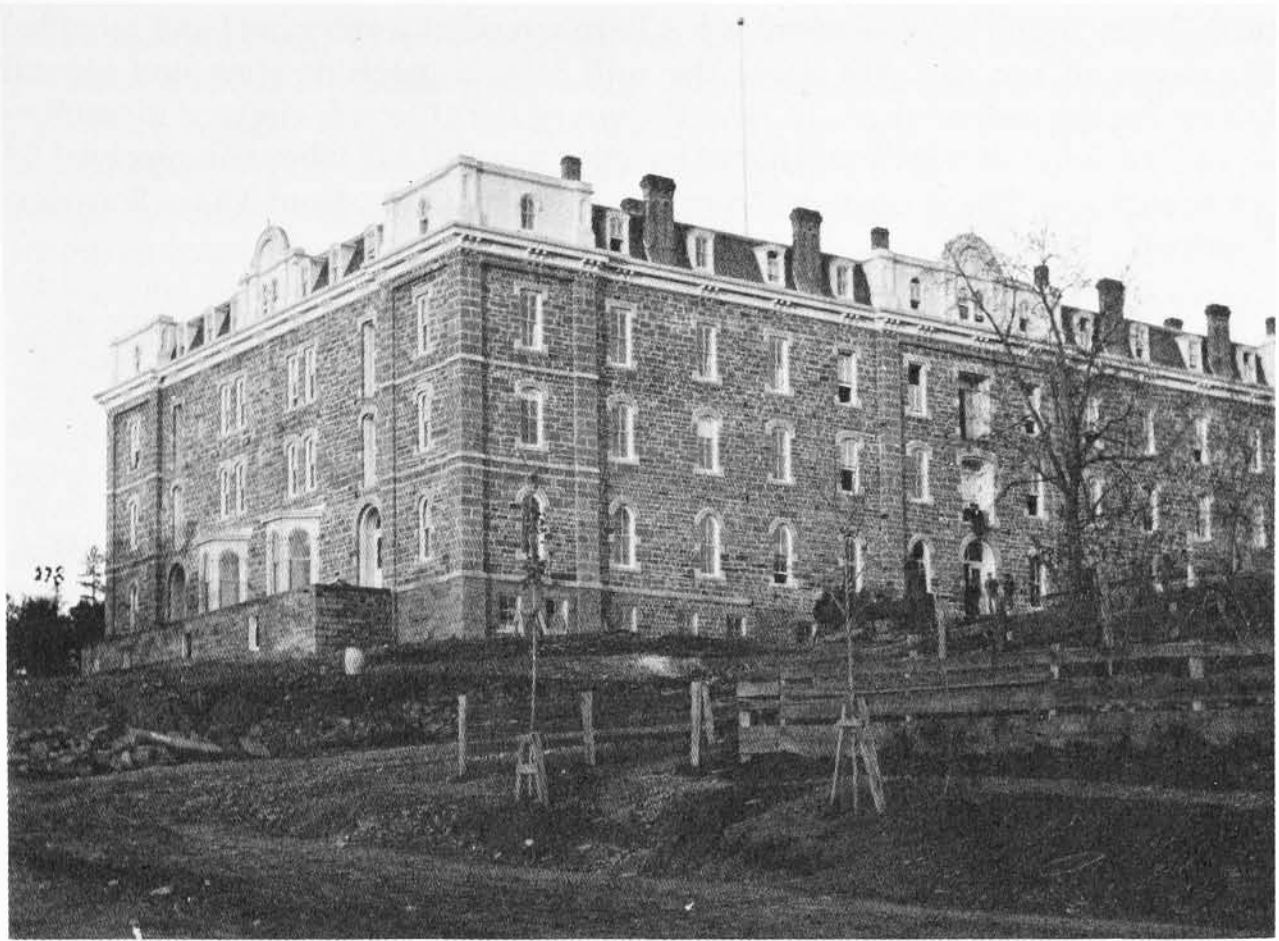
9 The University and Collegetown

Jane Marsh Dieckmann

On a windy day in early October 1868, Cornell University held its inauguration ceremonies in Library Hall down in the village of Ithaca. After luncheon a large throng climbed the long hill to the university. The group assembled around a makeshift wooden structure located on the site of the present undergraduate library, containing a chime of nine bells, the gift of Jennie McGraw of Ithaca. Nearby stood the first campus building, Morrill Hall, yet to be completed. As Morris Bishop records, its doors were standing wide open to welcome the gathering; but, Bishop adds, “they had to, as the hinges had not yet arrived.”¹ There were speeches, the bells rang out, and the fledgling institution was, to borrow the nautical metaphor of one Inauguration Day speaker, launched.

The only building that the new university had for its use was Cascadilla Place, an imposing gray stone structure standing to the south of Cascadilla Gorge, indeed standing where it does today, glistening and refurbished, awaiting the completion of its neighbor, the new Performing Arts Center. Back in 1868, however, Cascadilla looked much like a prison, gray and solid with many narrow windows, on a muddy slope with a dirt road in front and some rickety fences to mark paths around it.

Cascadilla Place had been constructed several years before, with an entirely different purpose. It was part of a dream of Dr. Samantha Nivison, who planned to establish a water-cure sanatorium; this was to be Ithaca’s first great hospital for the treatment of the sick and for the education of women as physicians and nurses. In this philanthropic project Dr. Nivison had enlisted the aid of a group of wealthy local persons, including Ezra Cornell, who had played a dominant role in overseeing the financing and construction of the building. Dr. Nivison’s dream fell through for lack of sufficient funds, and the building was pressed into the service of Mr. Cornell’s latest philanthropic project, an institution of higher learning which was to bear his name. Cascadilla Place was not only Cornell University’s first building, it served as the new institution’s focal point in the early years. Administration building, dormitory, dining room, social center—Cascadilla was, in effect, a small neighborhood.



74. The Cascadilla Hall in its early days, complete with paths and fences. The road in the foreground is Eddy Street. Photograph by Joseph C. Burritt.

Early Settlement on the Hill

Even before the village of Ithaca and its surroundings were first settled, the eastern hill had been an area of interest and attention. Around 1800, Simeon DeWitt, the surveyor general of New York State, had acquired large tracts of land at the south end of Cayuga Lake, most of Ithaca's present downtown area plus lands between the Fall Creek and Cascadilla gorges up on the hill. The area now occupied by the university was part of DeWitt's holdings, and the farmland was cleared early. It was grown to wheat in 1812, then was turned back to timber. The lower slope became a pasture.

The first settlement on the hill grew up around a commercial enterprise, Otis Eddy's cotton mill. Eddy's mill was located just beyond the eastern corporate boundary of the village of Ithaca, a street that would bear his name. The building—like its successor, Cascadilla Place—was of stone quarried from the gorge nearby, and the machinery was set into motion in 1827. The year before, on the Fourth of July, Eddy had constructed a dam in Cascadilla Creek (called Eddy's Dam), and water from the dam, conveyed by a raceway, formed Willow Pond (located at the top of the present College Avenue and called by one compiler of the *History of Tompkins County New York* "famed and roman-

tic"). Water from the pond went over a large overshot waterwheel and provided the power to run the mill. Near the mill were a machine shop and several houses for the mill workers. In 1828 the young Ezra Cornell engaged himself to serve Otis Eddy as a mill mechanic for one year. For his labors he received \$8 per month and board. In a description of Ithaca dating from 1834, Solomon Southwick writes:

You see on the hill east of the village a small group of buildings consisting of a cotton factory, a store, and about twenty dwelling houses, which, for the sake of distinction, we shall call Eddy's Villa. In both buildings there are altogether 1600 spindles which turn out 1000 yards of cotton daily. There are seventeen families attached to these mills. [p. 7]

Thus the area we now call Collegetown was settled very early. The cotton mill ceased operating in 1839, a victim of the financial disaster of 1837, and the building was torn down in 1866 to make way for Cascadilla Place.

At the time the university admitted its first students, there was just a scattering of houses on the hill. Years before, in 1828, a young Ezra Cornell, on his way to Ithaca from De Ruyter, had looked longingly upon the DeWitt farmland between the gorges. Twenty years later he bought a half share of this land, but was forced to yield his interest soon thereafter. In 1857, however, he was able to purchase the entire property. On the land was a farmhouse—generally thought to be completed in 1839 by William Linn DeWitt, the son of Simeon—which stood at the junction of the present Stewart Avenue and Campus Road. Ezra Cornell and his family moved into this house, naming the farm—which included a tenant house and large barn next to Fall Creek—Forest Park. Forest Park became a model farm. Cornell kept cattle and experimented with grain and vegetable crops. In the late 1860s Ezra Cornell turned the farm over to his son Franklin.

Besides Forest Park and Cascadilla, there was only one other outstanding structure on the hill in the early 1860s. To the south of Cascadilla stood a prominent mansion built in the 1830s by the Giles brothers of Ithaca. The house was built in two sections, one for each brother and his family, with a central area for the use of both families. (It became the home of Hiram Corson, Cornell's first professor of English; later it served as the manse for the Lutheran Church.) And by 1867 construction had begun on Ezra Cornell's Gothic villa, his only architectural extravagance (called Cornell's Folly by many), down the slope from Cornell University's first building and the future campus. For the rest, the hilltop was mostly farms and woods; there were only seven houses on Huestis Street (the present College Avenue). It was somewhat later that extensive construction began in Collegetown.

Early Cornell University

The story of Cornell University's beginnings have been described in detail elsewhere.² The founding of the university was made possible by Ezra Cor-

nell's generous gift of two hundred acres of his farm as a campus site. In planning their educational institution, Ezra Cornell and the university's first president, Andrew Dickson White, argued long and hard about the location of the campus. White wanted the university down the hill, where the men's dorms are today, while Cornell argued for the hilltop. Not only was the setting inspiring in its beauty (despite its inaccessability and rough terrain), it would assure the university room to expand and thus realize Cornell's vision of a large institution: "We shall need every acre for the future necessary purposes of the university."³ Although there were smiles when he said "some of you young people will see five thousand students on this campus," the student population reached 5,015 in the year 1913-14, and Cornell University was for several years the second largest American university in terms of full-time students.⁴

That first year, however, 412 students were admitted, a group of true pioneers. The small institution grew rather rapidly, and both institution and village were ill prepared for this expansion. The first buildings on campus, Morrill and White halls, were designed with classrooms in the center and student rooms at each end. With only these few rooms and Cascadilla, Cornell housing was in very short supply, and there was much crowding. The first students were divided into six companies, and daily life was organized according to a military regimen. The campus was an open field, with a few trees and a few fences here and there; in fact, it was the cow pasture of the Forest Park farm, and owner Franklin Cornell had to be asked to get the cows to the barn when the students wanted to play baseball. The southern entrance to the campus from Cascadilla and the village was a rough wooden bridge. The walks and roads were deplorable—pedestrians and travelers were plagued variously by mud, dust, ice, and ruts—and in some places extra building boards were laid on the ground. Grading and landscaping were to come much later.

A year after the university opened, the student newspaper sent out an urgent appeal for Ithacans to build more houses nearer to the campus and to rent their rooms. President White was opposed to dorms; he felt that the housing and feeding of students was a private matter. In his view, the business of Cornell was education. The lack of funds for buildings in the early days led to the conversion of student housing into classrooms. Fewer and fewer students lived on campus, and rather soon big frame rooming houses renting at low rates began to spring up on the upper part of Huestis Street and along Eddy Street near Cascadilla.

Early life at Cornell was rugged to say the least. President White, who had rooms in Cascadilla until his own home was completed, described the building as "an ill-ventilated, ill-smelling, uncomfortable, ill-looking alms-house."⁵ On the top floor were dismal cells for the students; the second and third floors were divided into boxlike rooms for the faculty and their families. The building had gas lighting and outdoor privies. Dining facilities operated off and on; the food was reported to be abominable. As late as 1878 the manager of the dining room kept a pigsty near the walk to the bridge.

It was not only the students who faced inadequate housing as the institution grew. Where were the faculty to live? This truly unusual collection of men—



75. The wooden bridge over the Cascadilla Gorge at the south entrance to the campus. This early photograph shows Sage Chapel in the background. To the right was the path along the mill stream.

some extraordinarily gifted—had been recruited by President White. Many had been brought in as visiting professors, so naturally they sought rented rooms rather than permanent homes. Others petitioned for houses on the campus, and through the 1880s faculty “cottages” went up along East Avenue and west of Central Avenue. These dwellings ranged from simple to monumental. Charles Babcock, Cornell’s first professor of architecture, designed his own cottage—the first to be built on the campus, in 1873. Some students found it a poor specimen, being small and “having square windows.”⁶ Professor McCoon’s house was enormous, obviously designed to accommodate student boarders. It was purchased by the university in 1882 and served as the residence of presidents Adams and Schurman. By 1871 Andrew Dickson White had decided to build his own house (he no doubt had grown tired of life in the “alms-house”), which he would then give to the university. His Gothic Revival villa on the East Avenue hillside was the most elegant of the houses in the campus neighborhood. It was designed in part by William Henry Miller, Cornell’s first student of architecture, who designed many faculty homes and university buildings, including Uris Library. The president and his family moved into the new villa in 1874. White’s house was surpassed in splendor only when the palatial chateau of Jennie McGraw Fiske (another of Miller’s



76. Two buildings designed by William Henry Miller. (Above) The McCoon "cottage" on East Avenue. It was the home of presidents Adams and Schurman. (Below) Andrew Dickson White's villa at 27 East Avenue, shortly after the family moved in (1874). As was the custom at the time, the house picture featured children on the lawn and the horse and buggy.