Reynolds Arcade in Rochester epitomized the merchant’s sorted cityscape of the nineteenth century. Completed in 1829 and remodeled at midcentury, the Arcade was a landmark piece of urban promotion that continued to be an important touchstone in the social and aesthetic ordering and physical renewal of the maturing city. One newspaper described the Arcade as “the chief of landmarks, the most beaten thoroughfare, the very vortex of the city’s new and great place of congregation of the people at all times.”

Geographically, the Arcade reflected the anticipated and actual rise in land values and the expansion of the commercial district. Functionally, it promoted overlapping economic relationships, creating webs of commercial exchange among the landlord Reynolds; his shopkeeper tenants; the eastern manufacturers, who produced most of the goods for sale in the Arcade; members of the local rising professional class who offered their services from Arcade offices; the customers who purchased their goods and services; and the public who depended on the intelligence gleaned from the mail delivered to the Arcade post office. Architecturally, the Arcade helped to define the commercial district and then preserve it. Culturally, it was an eloquent symbol of Rochester’s social and architectural refinement. The rare building type distinguished Rochester, giving it a particular panache among all American cities. The Arcade embodied the aspirations of the merchant class, whose members sought an efficient, profitable, beautiful commercial experience whose very space, products, and image served their business and social needs. Moreover, the way in which the ensemble of Arcade buildings cast out peddlers and wastrels eloquently testified to the Arcade’s powers of social gentrification.
The Architecture of Commercial Competition

Reynolds Arcade established, maximized, and refined the identity of the Four Corners as Rochester’s premier commercial district. Both its construction and remodeling showed the response of the Reynolds family to two parallel commercial conditions within the city. One was simply the economic opportunity to maximize the productivity of their centrally located double lots by exploiting the interior of the block. The other was to draw business specifically to this site and away from rival sites (Fig. 45). By the time Abelard Reynolds built his arcade, the commercial district was already pressing beyond its Four Corners location. Even the Genesee River was unable to stop the commercial tide, and merchants built their shops directly on the roadbed of the Buffalo Street bridge. In 1828 the east bank developer Elisha Johnson had built a massive five-story, 130–room hive known as the Globe Buildings at the other end of the Buffalo Street bridge on what was called Main Street. The expanding commercial vigor that fueled the economy, however, threatened the old center.

Abelard Reynolds’s allegiance to redeveloping his double lots on Buffalo Street was both pragmatic and political. The east bank settlement of Brighton township developed by Elisha Johnson had been officially annexed to west bank Rochester in 1823, and the Buffalo Street bridge linked both banks in a continuous line of commerce. Nonetheless, political and commercial rivalries between the two sides remained. Having settled in Rochester in 1813, the pioneering Reynolds developed strong and lasting ties to the west bank and to Nathaniel Rochester, who had helped secure Reynolds’s appointment as postmaster, appointed him to the board of directors of the Bank of Rochester, and supported his successful candidacy for the New York legislature. Johnson had been in the area nearly as long but as an investor in rival settlements on the east bank. He had been sued by Nathaniel Rochester regarding the construction of the east bank mill dam and subsequent flooding of Rochester in 1817, and, as a Democrat, Johnson had continued to oppose Nathaniel Rochester’s Republican maneuvering in local and state politics. Thus, Johnson’s expansive Globe Buildings on Main Street not only threatened the commercial dominance of the Four Corners shops, but it also personally challenged the economic and social hegemony of the Four Corners founders. The fact that Vandewater’s 1831 tourist guide recommended seeing this complex as part of any tour of Rochester confirmed the east bank’s rise.

Reynolds immediately responded to Johnson by constructing his
unique Arcade. He relocated his wood-framed tavern, saddlery, and post office building to the rear of the lot to make room for the new Arcade. As originally built, the four-and-a-half-story Arcade ran back fifty-six feet and presented six separate storefronts running ninety-nine feet along Buffalo Street. A wing connected the central open hall of this front Arcade to a rear Arcade measuring sixty by ninety feet. Behind this lay the old frame tavern. The roof was crowned by a distinctive public observatory “in the form of Chinese pagoda” that towered ninety feet above the street, making the Arcade both a sight to see as well as a place from which to see the sights (Figs. 14, 46). It is unclear to what degree Reynolds was aware of the arcades being erected in New York City, Philadelphia, Providence, and Stonington, Connecticut, but his motivations and strategy echo those of Cyrus Butler in Providence. That arcade, too, was built as a response to changing real estate interests. The Rochester Arcade, however, was built to reaffirm the centrality of the original commercial core, not to expand it.

Increasing land values in the Four Corners prompted Reynolds to intensify his utilization of the Arcade’s double lot. After only a decade of use, the Arcade underwent a series of remodelings and tinkering. In 1838 Reynolds again relocated his frame tavern, this time to the other side of Bugle Alley in the back. In its place he constructed another connected building dedicated solely to the post office. In 1842 Reynolds unified all three Arcade buildings into a single Arcade comprising eighty-six rooms subdivided into forty-two rental properties, the whole edifice stretching continuously from Buffalo Street to Bugle Alley (later known as “Works Street”). The post office was located in the rear northwest corner of the Arcade until 1859, when it moved across the hall to the northeast corner; a lateral addition to the east in 1862 provided yet more space for the postal and telegraph offices. Reynolds’s decision to extend the number of shops, continually relocating the tavern building and the institution of the post office, and then by extending the Arcade itself, was probably motivated by the increased rents he could get for the shops within a desirable central location. The recessed location of the post office and tavern served as magnets pulling people through the Arcade and thus maintained the flow of traffic through the passage.

The architectural refinement of the commercial district proved to be a never-ending process even for such celebrities as the Reynolds Arcade. The fashioned and refashioned Arcade buildings were gifts to the street, acts of architectural patronage on the part of Reynolds (Fig. 46). At the same time, they were also rhetorical slaps to business competitors. Looking back in 1887, the Rochester Herald recalled the architectural climate at midcentury:
“The owners of central property discovered that if they would retain the advantage they had so long enjoyed they must look to something beside locality, and that they must erect larger and better buildings to hold their advantage.”8 Commerce had been stretching not only along Buffalo Street but also up State Street. As part of the architectural refinement of the commercial district, other merchants were investing in newer and more fashionable business blocks. A rival dry goods firm had moved off the Buffalo Street bridge to State Street, and in 1846 Abelard’s son William was drawn into the architectural fray, galled by the competition’s “elegant Store,” which was “very beautifully & tastefully arranged, and finished—but the principal point of attraction is the front of plate glass, which is very rich.”9 The owner of the Burns Building next door had also been making improvements, adding plate glass windows between new cast-iron columns and adding another story for a new Masonic Hall. William Reynolds worried that “it makes our building look flat” and threatened to eclipse the Arcade’s rooftop observatory.10

Pride was only part of the problem. Watching the emergence of a luxury dry goods row on State Street, William Reynolds warned his father, “I find public sentiment is very strong against Buffalo Street for Dry Goods & unless Something is done Soon to render Buffalo St Stores more attractive, we shall have to abandon that description of business & fit up the Stores for some other business.”11 This was a challenge that the Reynolds could not afford to decline.

Intent on changing the Arcade’s fortunes, father and son began to implement a series of architectural interventions intended to restore the building’s original stature.12 Aesthetic awakenings required architectural patrons to look beyond the local area for ideas and materials. Just as Henry Dillaye had traveled to the metropolises back east in search of architectural ideas for his Washington Block in Syracuse, the Reynolds family inspected New York City buildings. William specifically instructed his father to inspect the glass and shutters in the city and to take a look at the New York showcases, including the fabled Marble Palace of A. T. Stewart on Broadway.13 In this climate of visual refinements Abelard and William Reynolds finally turned to an architect for assistance. The local architect D. C. McCallum sketched out his plans and proposed changes typical of the period: removing several piers and replacing them with cast-iron columns and reconfiguring the facade into a series of recessed entrances filled with plate glass windows. William Reynolds supported the idea of the renovation and defended its expense to his father: “It would be Splendid improvement for the Hall &
would make the 2 stores at the entrance very showy & desirable. . . . The whole improvement . . . will cost 7 or $800—which I am aware is a great deal of money to spend—but I do believe it will be a good investment, in the influence it will have in enabling us to rent the rooms in the Hall—without something to give a new impulse to things, We Cannot Sustain the rents in the Hall.”

14 Fashion, he was convinced, could “give a new impulse to things.”

15 The remodeled facade fit in perfectly with the prevailing taste for order and uniformity. Rows of plate glass, open-fronted shops marched across the facade. The observation tower was an architectural exclamation point to the Arcade’s fashion statement.

Abelard and William conceived of the remodeled Arcade as the setting for a full-fledged genteel tableau (Fig. 47). The public entered the Buffalo Street front through a narrow lobby graced by scenic paintings of the Genesee and Niagara Falls. The Arcade hall then opened up as a glass-covered pedestrian street running the depth of the block and rising fifty feet high. The architectural details of cast-iron shop fronts and balconies created an airy impression under the skylit hall and decorated lobby. The shops were politely retail or respectably professional; no butchers, hardware merchants, or artisans invaded such genteel settings. Before it relocated to the Athenaeum, the Mechanics Association reading room lent its cultured touch with inspirational busts of national and classical heroes, including DeWitt Clinton, Benjamin Franklin, Cicero, and Homer, interspersed among an ever expanding collection of books.

16 With its combination of commercial shops at street level and the self-help organization of the Mechanics’ reading room on the second floor, the Arcade picked up on the idea of social opportunity through economic achievement, a perfect virtue within a mercantile city.

William Reynolds’s midcentury plans to reinvigorate the Arcade Building mushroomed as the architectural standards and financial stakes escalated. The $800 estimate William had floated by his father in 1846 had grown to $12,000 by 1848, and even William admitted, “I am building much larger & more expensive than I designed when I made the loan.”

17 The mounting debts, however, were not solely caused by the Arcade.

In addition to improving the architectural amenities of the Arcade Building, in 1849 William Reynolds built the completely new, freestanding Athenaeum deep in the interior of the block, across the back alley from the Arcade (Fig. 45). Not coincidentally, one of the primary ways to access this new building was through the passage of the Arcade. Reynolds was convinced that the Athenaeum would draw more traffic through the Arcade,
reviving the older building’s fortunes while making new ones. The key to either building’s success would be to make the Athenaeum magnetic enough to attract the public. Embedded deep within the block, the first-floor shops opened up new retailing and shopping opportunities in the Four Corners area. The Mechanics Association on the second floor was a stand-alone business that brought its own clientele. Its library and meeting rooms enjoyed an automatic audience of members. The third-floor Corinthian Hall was elaborately designed to become the premier assembly hall in the city, drawing daytime exhibits and nighttime entertainments.

Functionalism made these spaces attractive to Rochesterians, but so, too, did beauty. Attention to appearances was now expected in architectural patronage, and Reynolds assured his public that the new edifice would hold “one of the most splendid halls of the kind in western New York. . . . The whole will be finished in the latest style, and made substantial and lasting.” The local architect Henry Searll designed a blocky three-story brick edifice, embellished with Italianate details at the windows and cornice, the whole dominated by a yawning aedicule framing the imposing, two-story entryway, whose classical entablature was inscribed “Athenaeum” and “Mechanics Association” (Fig. 49). William Reynolds’s words showed how deeply commercial ideals had co-opted the civic. He proudly declared that the “lofty Grecian entrance” of the Atheneum would bestow upon the commercial building the dignified “appearance of a public edifice” and promised that it “will be an ornament to that part of the city.”

The coup de grâce was the Corinthian Hall on the top floor (Fig. 50). Known for its architecture, the assembly hall was luxuriously embellished with two Corinthian columns flanking the stage and Corinthian pilasters alternating with twenty-eight windows standing sixteen feet tall. The lofty ceilings were twenty-six feet high, and the capacious room, with its much-heralded acoustics, was capable of holding hundreds of attendees, reaching full capacity with an estimated sixteen hundred guests at one overflowing event.

The Reynolds’ responses to commercial competition had stimulated both an economic and architectural renewal at the Four Corners. Edwin Scrantom marveled over the architectural metamorphosis of the alley that accessed both the rear of the Arcade and the front of the Athenaeum. “The same transforming element has been at work on Mill street and points adjacent. Where, in the recollection of the writer, were formerly a few cabins or lines of barns and out-houses, now stand in majestic column, long rows of splendid brick and stone edifices, and modern built mercantile houses for wholesale trade, and the place is no longer ‘tin-pot-alley,’ or ‘bugle alley,’
or ‘skunk lane,’ as it once was, but a finished street with granite side-walks, and buildings and streets in the royal finish and perfection, that are beyond any former time” (Fig. 51). Commenting on the new buildings that faced the improved alley, a local newspaper crowed that Rochester was gaining on the urban leaders: “Works street will be able to boast of as much fine architecture as any other street in the city, not only of its size, but of any size.”

Urban Promotion

The new nineteenth-century mercantile cities needed to develop extra-local reputations in order to attract human and economic investment. The Reynolds family acted as classic city boosters when they constructed the ever-expanding Arcade. The building made an ambitious statement of urban conditions and urbane culture. The Reynolds Arcade bolstered the business interests of the Reynolds family, their Four Corners neighborhood, and the wider city. The Arcade was a place-making piece of architecture which helped to put Rochester on the map. A showy hotel garnered attention, but the rarity of an arcade put Rochester in a special class of American and European cities. Residents took particular pride in their Arcade, pointing it out to visitors and immortalizing it in local poetry. Penned one hotelier in his distinctive Scottish brogue: “We hae a splendid, bauld Arcade, Which leaves all ithers in the shade.” They even produced musical compositions such as “The Rochester Arcade Quick Step,” with the building emblazoned on the cover of the sheet music (Fig. 46). The sophistication of the Arcade and the gentility of its shops encouraged metropolitan comparisons with mixed results. Whereas some Europeans found Rochester and its arcade quite provincial, others were impressed, such as Frederika von Bremer, who commented on the “handsome, well-lighted room in a large, covered arcade, in which were ornamental shops like those arched bazaar-arcades in Paris and London.” Homespun Americans were more easily impressed. Visiting the Arcade in 1831, a Long Island shoemaker marveled: “the stranger standing in the midst of this place can hardly believe that only 20 short years since the spot on which this town stands was a howling wilderness. This place has all the appearance of splendor and fashion of our sea board populas [sic] towns.” In 1856 the remodeled glass and iron interior prompted the honorific title of Rochester’s “permanent crystal palace,” a tribute surpassing the temporary exhibition architecture of London’s Crystal Palace of 1851 as well as New York City’s 1853 version.
To be fair, the Arcade paled in comparison to the arcades of Europe, and it was also a plainer version than its few American counterparts. The Arcade’s 1829 brick facade and awkward cupola contrasted poorly with the 1828 arcade in Providence, Rhode Island, with its sophisticated classical detailing and interpenetrating granite facade. But the Arcade was not competing with the arcade in Providence or any other east coast established city; it was competing with East Rochester and other nearby upstarts. In this capacity it was quite successful. Like it or not, Reynolds Arcade was an extraordinary piece of architecture that was literally remarkable. It helped establish the urban credibility of Rochester and the New York interior. As the resident Jenny Marsh Parker proudly explained, “it stamped our individuality when we were hardly expected to have individuality.”

In keeping with the mercantilist city-building endeavor, the Arcade fostered the business of business in a larger geo-economic sense, not simply by renting quarters to retailers and professionals but, more broadly, by providing the space for institutions that forged links along the mercantile chain of cities and even across the nation. As with any shop, the sale of eastern-imported goods sent profits across the state, and the sale of locally made necessities stimulated regional production. For that reason alone the Arcade would have been economically important. But the Arcade held more than shops. William Reynolds described the Arcade as a “sort of Merchants exchange for this city.”

Holding the post office made the Arcade one of the more important spaces of residents’ daily routine. Being in the information loop was critical in gaining commercial advantages. Post offices were critical to a city’s development. Nathaniel Rochester had pushed to get Rochester a designated postal stop that would make it the central source for commercial intelligence, and Syracuse had even changed its name from Corinth in order to receive a post office. Noting the benefit of the post office to Rochester’s economic and cultural development, an 1836 article in the nationally distributed *American Magazine of Useful Knowledge* remarked, “the annual income of its post-office, which is a good test both of its literary taste and commercial prosperity, is over $14,000.” The post office was also a marketing tool for Arcade businesses. The recessed location of the post office drew people into the Arcade and along past the shops. During the 1840s the new telegraph office joined the post office in the Arcade, making it the magnetic hub of commercial intelligence for local and regional business interests. The Arcade contained professional offices upstairs, including for a few years those of the prominent magazine the *Genesee*
The magazine’s location in Rochester not only symbolized Rochester’s connections to its hinterland but also gave merchants the easiest access to hinterland strategies that might, in turn, influence their own merchandising, milling, or manufacturing decisions. The magazine also placed Rochester squarely in the middle of a national readership interested in agrarian, rural, and market improvements, all key concerns in the mercantile expansion of cities and market on the eastern frontier.

The Arcade therefore provided not just goods and services but also communication, linking people to events in the world outside. Access to current information was vital in any business dealings. Cities with the best information links—those having access to newspapers, post offices, telegraph offices, and business travelers on active transportation lines—became the major economic centers. The expansion of “intelligence flows” resulted in the extension of the wholesaler’s trade area and thus commercial profits. The benefits of the rapid circulation of economic information accrued most quickly and conveniently to businesses close to those circulation points. The post office, telegraph office, canal offices, and eventually train stations were never far from one another, nor were they far from the merchants who were accordingly drawn to and contributed to the centrality of the commercial district as the communications site. The major economic actors therefore clustered near these relay points. By 1863 the Arcade held not only the post office and Western Union Telegraph office but also four insurance agencies, three real estate brokers, one commercial information agency, one banking office, and the internal revenue collector’s office. Thus, the Arcade was a clearinghouse as well as a market house for mercantilist opportunities. Information, ideas, lines of credit, and cash flowed through the Arcade’s halls.

Commercially Conditioned Public Space

Both the interior space and exterior presence of the collective Arcade buildings acted as tools to promote the kind of businesslike and genteel behavior advocated by the bourgeois city leaders. By midcentury the local newspaper could report that, among the “concentration of so many places of business,” the Arcade Building was the preeminent “place of public resort” from dawn to late at night, thronged with people “giving an air of cheerful bustle and activity.” The building was an exemplar of the city’s commercially conditioned public space, not only within its walls but also without.
Each improvement swelled the Arcade’s business. A more critical appraisal might have noted that the primary clientele, however, was the city’s bourgeoisie, who benefited from the creation of genteel spaces.

The Arcade enhanced the personal display of gentility by both tenants and customers and thus was a space that was not only good for business but also good for enacting the class-based ritual of the promenade. An 1851 illustration depicted the genteel spectacle of frock-coated gentlemen with top hats and walking sticks and demurely-dressed ladies in shawls and bonnets accompanied by companions or children (Fig. 47). Some of the customers are peering into shop windows; others have stopped their stroll for the simple pleasures of conversation. From the mezzanine professionals and their clients enjoy the prospect below as well as their own convivial display. The social and spatial tableau combined self-consciousness with niceties and reinforced the bourgeois code enactment of social order. “The Arcade was a common rendezvous where busy citizens said ‘good morning,’ and those from the country round about, who meet less frequently, ‘how are you?’ and we believe it contributed not a little, though of course in a most incidental way, to that general acquaintance and good understanding which is so important in every well ordered community.”

Functionally, architecturally, and rhetorically, the new Athenaeum explicitly commingled the idea of civic and commercial space. Cloaked in both the nomenclature and style of classical humanism, the Athenaeum and Corinthian Hall invoked a sense of civic purpose. The very type of the institution—an athenaeum—romantically harkened back to the idea of a democratic civic space in which ideas and learning were shared. And the naming and outfitting of the public assembly room—the Corinthian Hall—redoubled the classical allusion to ancient Greece. Because ancient Corinth was famed as a trade center, it is also possible that the nineteenth-century literati considered the name Corinthian particularly appropriate for a landmark gracing a mercantile city. William Reynolds pushed the idea of the Athenaeum as a civic edifice, with himself as the architectural (and hence civic) benefactor. Merchants had once again used architectural patronage to reiterate their cultural and economic authority in the city while simultaneously creating the kinds of settings which suited their own personal and class interests. The mingling of civic and commercial connotations in the Athenaeum never threatened the integrity of the actual civic district, composed of the courthouse and what had grown to be four churches on the Buffalo and Fitzhugh streets axis, but, rather, perpetuated the early principle that what was good for commerce was good for the civitas.
Even with the presence of a private watchman, however, the tableau crafted by the assembled Arcade buildings presented a compromised gentility. The Buffalo Street Arcade provided only a partial solution to the physical and social unpleasantries of urban life. The skylit hall protected the public from foul weather and mucky streets, but anybody could enter the Arcade. Rambunctious boys had to be reigned in from spitting on the mural. The post office attracted all types of people. Both the front and back entrances to the Arcade were bracketed by the very people the arcading public preferred to avoid: the blind organ grinder camped out by the front doors and the old woman selling matches out back.\textsuperscript{37} In addition, the Reynoldses’ attempts to hold onto the dry goods business had obviously failed. There was only one merchant tailor dealing in cloth by the time an 1863 directory of the Arcade was published, and he operated in the side wing of an upper floor.\textsuperscript{38}

The 1863 directory provides a useful glimpse into the spatial sorting within the Arcade. Six shops fronted Buffalo Street without connecting to the Arcade (Fig. 48). These shops were all part of the commercial mix on the street: two tailors, a bookstore, a druggist, a banking and insurance office, and a shoe store. Flanking the lobby entrance, the public was greeted by Dewey’s expansive bookstore and a jeweler, creating a suitably genteel entree for the bourgeoisie, including females. But, in fact, the shops deeper into the hall were oriented to men, with insurance, real estate, a cigar store, and the eating, drinking, and smoking rooms of the Arcade House, all tapping into the clientele pulled in by the post and telegraph offices. A “hair cutter” (as opposed to barber) advertised that he did ladies, gentlemen, and children’s hair cutting, but it seems doubtful that ladies actually came to the Arcade shop. The second story similarly held professional offices that employed and catered largely to men. In addition to the Reynoldses’ business office there were at least ten attorney offices, three real estate offices, the internal revenue collector’s office, the customhouse clerk’s office, plus a dentist, barber, and architect. Indicative of their status in the city, the middle-class male had earned his rarefied space.

The upper floors assumed a decidedly artistic cast, containing at least fifteen art studios, including artists, sign painters and wood grainers, an engraver, a drawing teacher, landscape painters, portrait painters, a sculptor, several daguerreotype studios, and even a designer of artificial limbs whose artistry resembled “Nature’s own handiwork.”\textsuperscript{39} As an early Bohemian quarter, the artist colony in the upper reaches of the Arcade catered to the odd mix of the elite and the down and out. Here mixed a cultured
public whose members sought artwork or art lessons, members of the general public who were drawn to the plush parlors and affordable prices of the daguerreotype studios, and the jarring contrast of mutilated mill and factory operatives needing prosthetics. The third-story remove of the locations perhaps also gave these cheaper quarters genteel associations of privacy. Whether taking drawing lessons from Miss E. L. Smith or posing for a portrait, the female customer would not have been sitting on display. The daguerrean studios explicitly advertised special accommodations for ladies, including dressing rooms and salons. The architectural setting, however, retained its powerful associations of gentility, preserving it as a place of popular resort for a variety of residents. Although inconsistent, the overall tenor was one of unique, rarefied purpose that gave the Arcade an elevated identity.

At street level the tenants at the Athenaeum, including a confectioner, were similar to those of the Arcade. But the clients became more selectively clubby on the upper stories. The reading room was open to the male members of the sponsoring institution and to all ladies and gentlemen; Alcesta Huntington came here to read while waiting for her ride home. The Corinthian Hall was the venue for numerous events whose only occasional exclusionary feature was charging admission. But the alley it fronted was hardly a genteel entry.

Analyzed at the neighborhood scale, rather than just the building scale, the Arcade and Athenaeum projects were part of a larger social reclamation project that favored the interlaced bourgeois and mercantile cultures dominating the new cities. Explicitly, the Arcade was about profit maximization, reclaiming the Four Corners as the preeminent commercial location and creating a genteel setting for social and commercial relations. Implicitly, the Arcade was about literally removing and figuratively marginalizing the people and activities that challenged the economic and social refinement of the building and its larger neighborhood. The Arcade buildings not only cut into the interior block but also cut out what was there—mucky alleys littered with ramshackle buildings and a cast of social undesirables. Redevelopment transformed nefarious Bugle Alley behind the Arcade, first into the productive Works Street and then into the fashionable Exchange Place that fronted the Athenaeum. The very renaming of the interior alley traced the upgrading of the street’s contribution to the city’s image.

Remembered as an “abandoned quagmire, the common garbage receptacle of the neighborhood, unpaved and unlighted,” Bugle Alley was a problematic rear entrance to the Arcade and an even less auspicious front
entrance to the Athenaeum. The longtime Buffalo Street businessman Edwin Scrantom recalled the general tenor of the back alley: in addition to housing quarrelsome and inebriated Irish, the “back of the Arcade was the great place in early days for Indian ‘drunks.’” He proceeded, “Unlike today, that place was a great hiding place, and one of quiet; until, from the many mixtures of depraved human nature there, it got the name of ‘tin-pot-alley,’ and afterwards ‘bugle alley.’” Even before the Arcade was constructed, the citizens of Rochester, including Abelard Reynolds, had formed a public watch to dispel the disturbing increase in vice and crime in the city. Failing as a private organization, they supported the establishment of a police force to maintain order. Although crime was a concern, it appears that vice was the greater problem in the secluded back alley. The police blotter in 1837 recorded the following incidents:

July 29, Patrick McKann found on Work St. Drunk & Asleep.

August 26, Sarah Owen (alias) Sarah Collins found on Works Street some Drunk at ½ past 10 at night . . . police charge disorderly & vagrancy Com. Prostitute.

Sept 17, James Mix found back of Arcade at Mr. Thomas Beards Deranged put in W[atch] House before police charged Insane (Delivered over to Poor Master).

Bugle Alley, in short, was a social problem for the likes of the founding fathers and city leaders, including the Reynoldses, the Scrantoms, and the Rochesters. The following year Abelard Reynolds began his first remodeling of his ten-year-old Arcade.

By cutting into the interior of the alley, erecting showy pieces of architecture, and drawing a continual throng of people through the interior of the block, the Reynoldses’ construction projects literally exposed the litter of activities and personalities which had challenged the bourgeois merchant class’s ideas about both the economic efficiency and social gentility appropriate to a commercial district. Architecture and urban planning exposed and refined these hidden urban spaces and their occupants. The Reynoldses’ constant building projects maintained the morphological, architectural, and social pressure on the secluded back alleys. Visibility and order went hand in hand. The commercial redevelopment of the alley tried to push these unwanted denizens out of the gentrifying commercial district by exposing their hidden ways to public scrutiny. It was a distinctly bourgeois response
to the deeper structural problems of high real estate costs, uneven development, and the absence of social services. Where these denizens went, let alone the causes of their derelict behavior, was not the primary concern. Rather, the impetus was on establishing an economically productive, visually and socially sorted, ordered commercial district.

The 1849 addition of the Athenaeum increased the pressure by routing bourgeois shoppers, reading room members, and the general public attending fairs and events through the alley. What daylight and shop fronts could not achieve, perhaps a disquieting bourgeois throng could. Evening events in the Corinthian Hall were particularly helpful in maintaining public oversight of the secluded and darkened backstreets. Known for its edifying entertainments, national luminaries such as Daniel Webster, Horace Greeley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Louis Agassiz delivered public lectures there (Fig. 50). The right setting, which included high-style interior design, such as the Corinthian Hall’s columned and pilastered space, helped improve the tenor of any event. Even the views of controversial speakers such as the women’s rights advocate Victoria Woodhull, the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, and the phrenologist Orson Squire Fowler, who spoke about marriage and “sexuality and creative economies,” became polite subjects for consideration within such architecturally elevated surroundings. It similarly sanctioned amusement by providing elegant conditions for such eye-opening performances as those by the actress Fanny Kemble and the dancer Lola Montez. The ladies of the Rochester Charitable Society, who had a generation earlier refused to sanction theatrical events by accepting any proceeds, changed their tune when offered a share in the receipts of the “Swedish Nightingale” Jenny Lind’s recital in the Corinthian Hall. When the newspaper reported that the Arcade buildings were a “place of public resort” from dawn to late at night, thronged with people “giving an air of cheerful bustle and activity,” it was acknowledging the social hygiene of the setting as much as its popularity.

### Citizen Reynolds

The linkages between the merchant and the mercantile city which had implicitly guided the economic and cultural colonization of the interior found full voice in the expressions of mourning at the 1872 death of William Reynolds, or, as one memorialist called him, “Citizen Reynolds.” William Reynolds became the exemplar of the merchant as public citizen. The numerous memorials and eulogies made in his honor all emphasized that
Reynolds was “an eminently public-spirited man,” and “remarkable for his enterprising public spirit.”

Reynolds’s municipal leadership led him to serve on the City Common Council, Trustees of the Rochester Savings Bank, Trustees of the University of Rochester, the Managers of the House of Refuge, and the Board of the Athenaeum and Mechanics Association.

Yet it was not just his social responsibility that earned him accolades. It was also his fulfillment of the idea of merchant as the patron of the city. As if to fulfill the challenge raised by architectural and cultural critics such as James Jackson Jarves and David Buel, the Reynoldses had used architecture to build their own reputations and that of their city. The father, Abelard, was praised for the construction of the landmark Arcade building, and his son William was credited with continuing the legacy. “His history and that of this city are closely allied,” penned the mourning Arcade tenants; “no man has more completely identified himself with the growth and vigorous prosperity of Rochester during the several stages of her history than he.”

The local newspapers equated Reynolds with the city: “As regards the public and business life of the deceased, it is the history of the prosperity of Rochester,” and then it proceeded directly into a discussion of the Arcade and Corinthian Hall as proof.

As patrons of architecture, the Reynoldses had bestowed gifts to the street and city. The City Common Council specifically paid tribute that William’s “laudable pride and ambition ever was to make this city beautiful and attractive.”

The *Rochester Union and Advertiser* specifically pointed out how the “beautiful” Corinthian Hall redeemed “one of the most disagreeable spots in the city.”

Memorialists ascribed a certain morality to William Reynolds’s building decisions: “Every one who has observed the equality of the seating in Corinthian Hall . . . knows how faithfully he avoided . . . discrimination. The mechanic who came in his shirt-sleeves and with unshaven face, was served as well as the man whose bosom flashed with diamonds.”

The elite eulogists enjoyed this “democratic” premise without noting the social dislocations that had also accompanied the reclamation project. It was in the spirit of democratic community that the eulogist praised William Reynolds as a public figure: “representatives were gathered here from every class of society.” Then, without irony, he listed a bourgeois-heavy interpretation of “society”: “merchant, lawyer, banker, professor, teacher, millionaire, and day laborer.”

The idea of the merchant as the carrier of culture and morality as well as economic productivity was delivered with great flourish befitting funereal respects, and yet its rhetoric meshed with the early nine-
teenth-century rhetoric of city building too neatly to be coincidental. “It seems to me that the noble body of men who up to this time have given commercial credit, moral tone and an honorable reputation to our city, is fast passing away,” worried one writer. A local newspaper noted that the death “will justly be regarded as a calamity to our city,” as Reynolds had been “intimately associated not only with the business interests of Rochester, but no less closely with its moral and educational institutions.”

Just as merchants had privatized public space, now the private person of the merchant had become a public figure. “His death is a public loss,” mourned one newspaper; William Reynolds was “eminently a public man,” wrote another. Testifying to the public service of the man, Reverend Bartlett noted that, “were it our custom to hang our dwellings with the drapery of mourning on occasions when a noble, pure-minded, large-hearted, honored citizen had passed from among us, I doubt whether a single home would be without the symbols of bereavement.”

For the funeral the Arcade and Athenaeum were added metaphorically to the official list of mourners, draped inside and out in black crepe to “illustrate his tenants’ profound love and attachment for their friend and beloved, indulgent landlord.” The black crepe of mourning was only fitting because the news of his death “shrouded the hearts of all his tenants in the drapery of sorrow too painful to be described.” Flags were hung at half-mast, and the tenants placed a portrait of Reynolds on the rear wall of the bedecked Arcade as if it were a shrine. An “arch of gas jets” illuminated the portrait by night, and an “arch of evergreens and immortelles” replaced it by day. In a rather remarkable turn of events, businesses closed for the funeral of a merchant who had made business his business.

The Reynolds Arcade and Athenaeum showed the depth of the merchant’s ability to create a genteel tableau of commercially conditioned space that sorted people as well as activities. We see in the Arcade buildings both the fullest realization of a complex, commercial district within the sorted city and, at the same time, an entity that transcended a merely commercial identity by incorporating functional and rhetorical claims to public space. At the same time, we can see how the patrons of the buildings became lionized themselves as the benefactors of these public monuments and public good for the entire city. At the end of the Arcade hall were three sculpture niches containing busts of Abelard Reynolds and his two sons, who thus joined the pantheon of cultural heroes displayed in the reading room sculpture gallery.