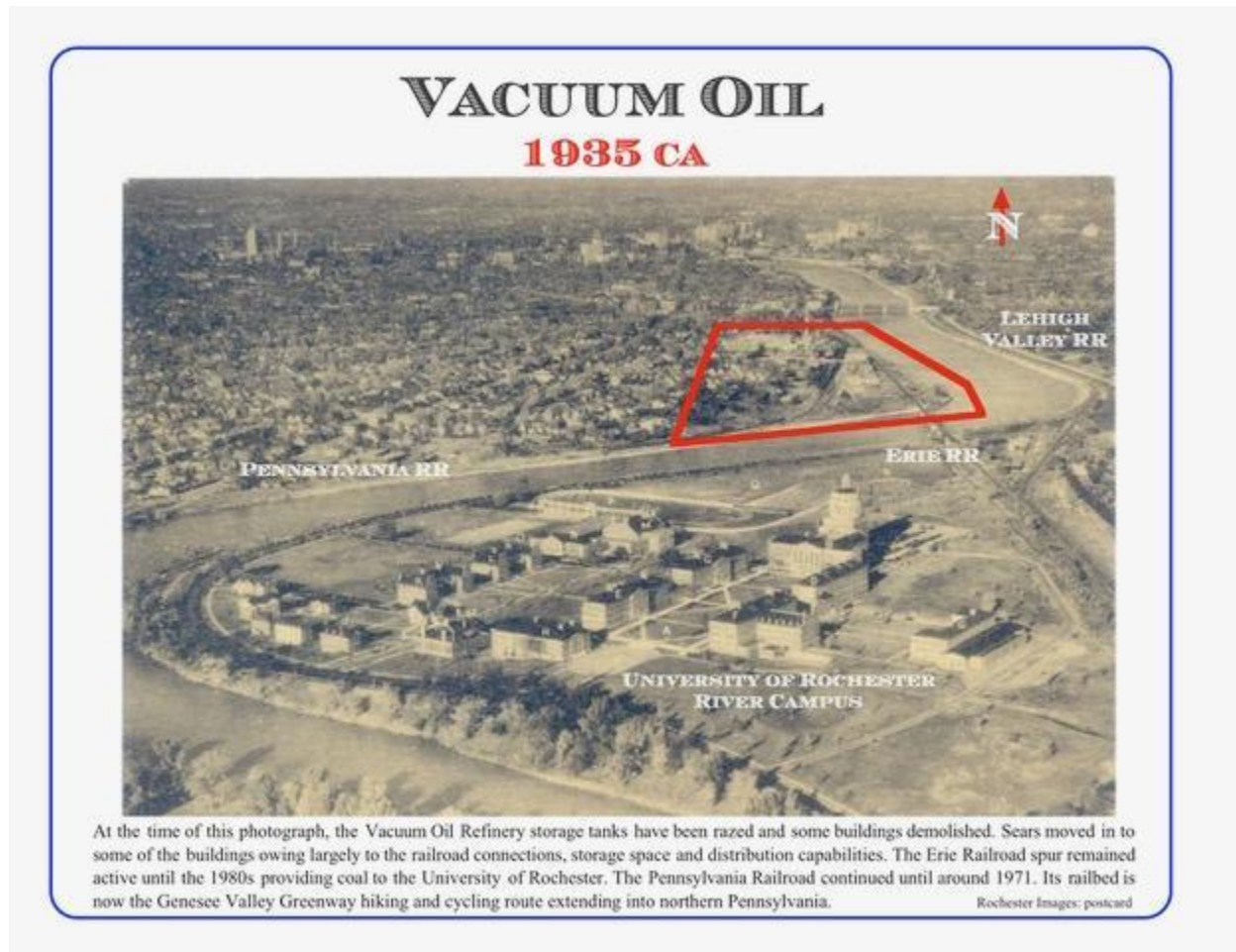


## Pilgrimage along the Genesee Riverway To the Vacuum Oil Brownfield Site

*Please join us on Saturday, September 20, 2025*

*10am – noon for a guided tour*



### **Know before you go:**

The trail is flat and paved, making it ADA accessible. The distance between Brooks Landing and the Vacuum Oil brownfield site is 1.5 miles, or 3 miles roundtrip. Stay on the paved path and keep off of the cement retaining wall to avoid poison ivy.

**We have planned a guided walk along the Riverway on Saturday, September 20, 2025 starting at 10 am** from Brooks Landing Business Complex to the Vacuum Oil Brownfield Site in Rochester, NY.

Meet at the Wok Tea Restaurant 912 Genesee St. at 10am (corner of Brooks Ave and Genesee Street). Coffee, tea, and restrooms will be available. Historian John Curran will curate the walk with us that day, and Father James Schwartz from Church of the Holy Spirit & St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield will lead us in prayer.

If you cannot join us on September 20th, we encourage you to walk this path on your own or with your own small group and use this guide.

### **How to access the trail:**

The river is visible from the Brooks Landing Business Complex parking lot. Walk eastward across a grassy field and across Plymouth Avenue. Head north (left) so the river will be on your right.

### **Pilgrimage Objective:**

To understand the environmental impact of our past decisions and to utilize that knowledge as we make decisions regarding the future of God's handiwork: the land, the water here and downstream, the animals, the residents of this area, and all of God's creation.

### **Pope Benedict XVI, November 6, 2010, Santiago de Compostella:**

"To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art, or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he has revealed himself, where his grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe."

### **A Prayer for Laudato Si' Pilgrims of Hope in the Jubilee Year of 2025:**

*God in Heaven, as we begin our journey today, we pray that You will accept the efforts we make on this pilgrimage. We offer it in praise of You and with love for all that You have created.*

*Be our companion along the way, our guide at the crossroads, our strength in weariness, our defense and danger, our shelter in heat and cold, our light in darkness, our comfort in discouragement.*

*Open our hearts to everything that we encounter, to see You in our human brothers and sisters and in every being which you have made, for all things speak of You. Help us to understand your will and to follow it with courage, confidence, and joy.*

*We pray that, with Your grace and guidance, we will share Your Good News with every creature and become agents of reconciliation and healing for all of creation. May our witness be a leaven of authentic hope, the harbinger of the new heavens and the new earth which You have in store for us. Help us to remember that this pilgrimage is just one step in our journey to You.*

*We pray in a special way for our new Pope Leo and his intentions. Give him the strength and wisdom he needs to guide your pilgrimage church on earth.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.*

### **Guided Walk:**

There is a pedestrian bridge as you cross Plymouth Avenue with a nice view of the river. Long ago a glacier had melted and left rocks and sediment in this area, making this part of the river shallow. Native people had paths through the forest leading to this area where they could easily wade across the river to the other side.

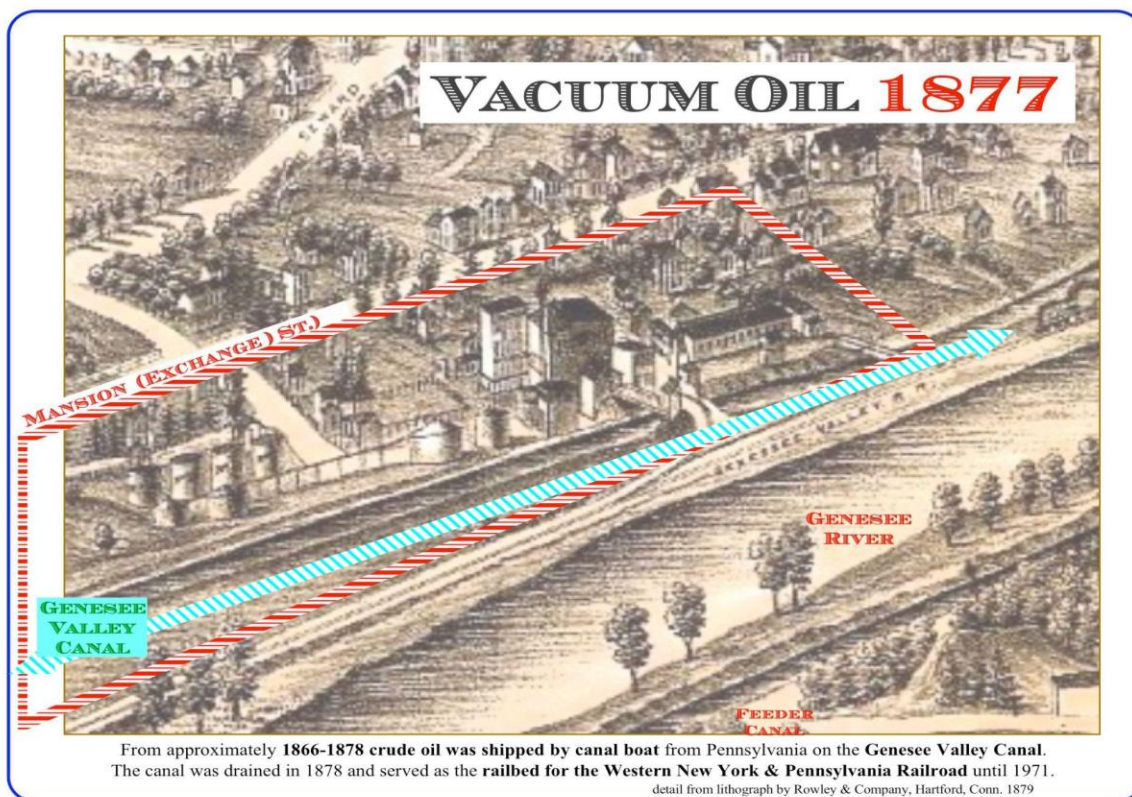
As white settlers arrived, they could navigate their ships along the River from Dansville as far as Brooks Landing, where you are currently standing. Brooks Landing became a place where young men came to work and take control of the land in the name of progress.

A feeder canal was dug to supply water to the Erie Canal aqueduct in downtown Rochester. Can you see the remains of the feeder canal from the pedestrian bridge? Two canals plus the feeder canal were built.



This was an opportune location for manufacturing as the Genesee River provided the critical source of transportation to receive raw goods and distribute the finished product. The Erie Canal led to Rochester becoming the first boom town in the USA. Soon 3 rail lines were built on this current trail to pass through this area.





As you walk northward along the path, notice that it separates from the street. The cement wall separating the path from the river was built to prevent flooding. (Eventually, a large dam was built in Mount Morris to control the water level and prevent Rochester from getting flooded by the river.)

Soon you'll be passing by backyards, and eventually just natural space without the sound of traffic. Perhaps you can still see some remnants of the old railroad?

### **Pause & Ponder:**

*What do you see and hear (rustle of the leaves in the wind, splash of water, song birds, what else)? It's calm and peaceful now.*

As you continue, you'll notice that trees have been cut down. A great deal of vegetation has been removed. Soil contaminated with Benzene from the Vacuum Oil Refinery will be excavated and removed (as much as 20 feet below the surface). Notice capped white pipes sticking out from the soil every now and then. Soil samples are being monitored for contamination. As you get closer to the location of the oil refinery, you will notice these pipes become more prevalent.

You'll come to a place where another pedestrian bridge (across from U of R) crosses the river and merges with the Genesee Riverway Trail on which you're walking. Turn right and enjoy the view from this bridge. This Pedestrian Bridge used to be a railroad bridge. Notice how shallow the water is here. This whole section of the river you've been walking along was very shallow. Dynamite was dropped down into wells drilled in the bottom of the river to make it deeper and navigable upstream.

**Pause & Ponder:**

*In this location you can see that the river is still shallow. Perhaps you'll see some wildlife coming to the river for a drink of water while you stand on this bridge.*

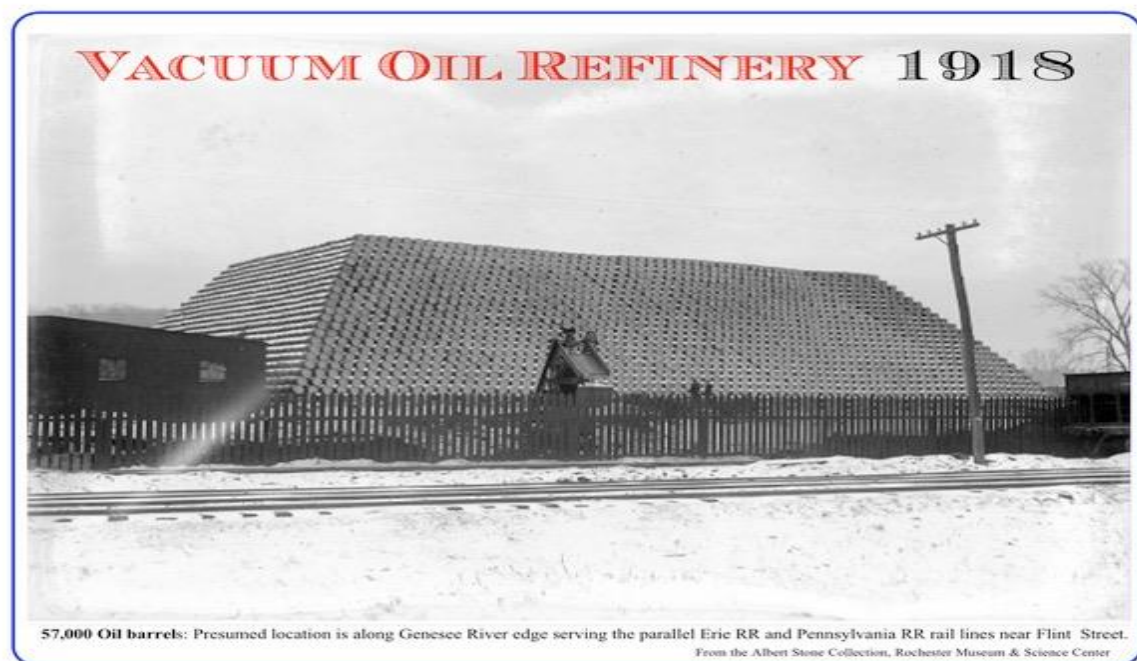
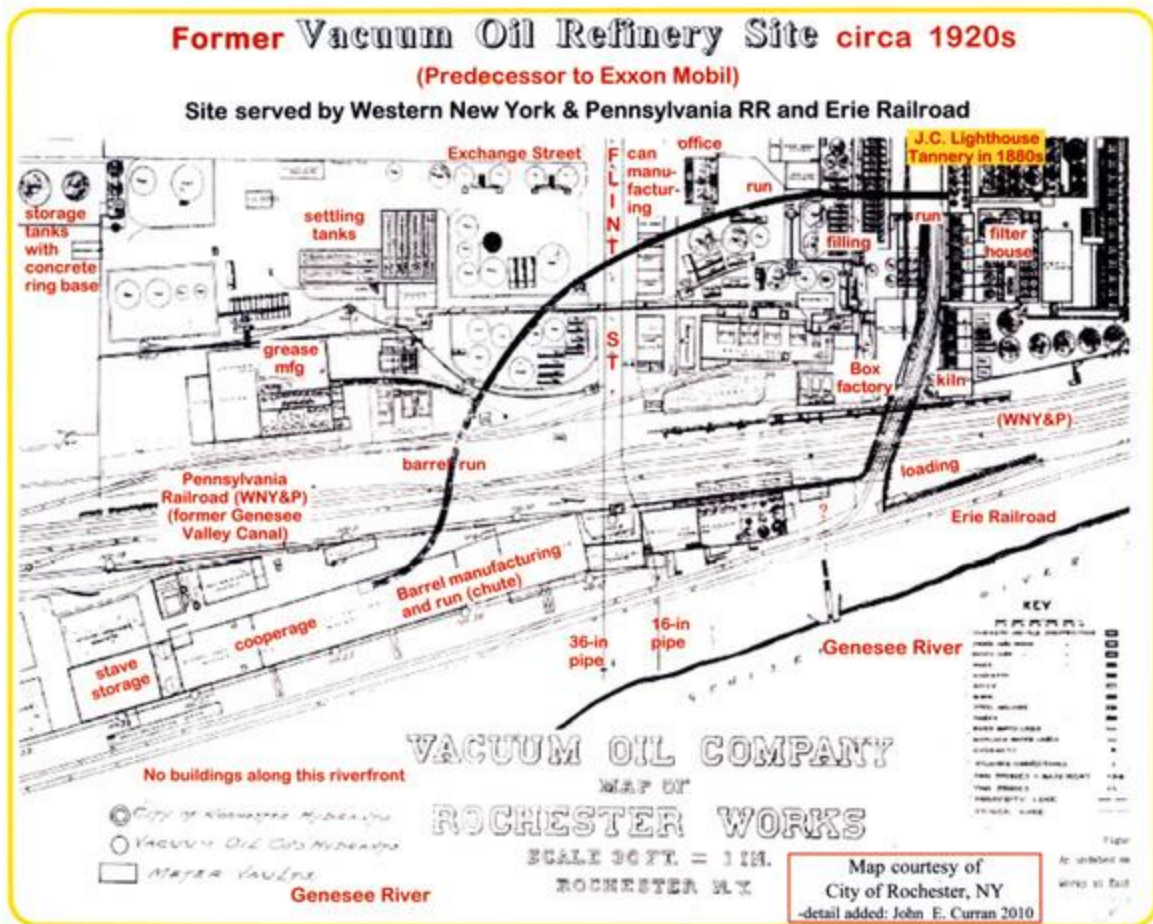
*Think about all the changes that people have made to this area. Say a prayer of thanks for the beauty that surrounds you here today.*

Return to the trail and continue north. During the Civil War, this area was a training camp for Union Soldiers. Once you get to a grassy clearing on the right, you will see a plaque dedicated to the brave men who trained here at Camp Fitz-John Porter.

**Pause & Ponder:**

*Stop to read the plaque and say a prayer for the soldiers who fought, and those who fight in wars today. Pray for peace that they may return home safely to their families.*

Continue along the path to the Vacuum Oil Brownfield site. If any of the buildings are still standing, you'll see where crude oil was refined into various petroleum-based products. There were huge holding tanks full of oil-based products. The puddles of water that collect in the ditches in this area still have an oil slick film that floats on top. Note the 1920's circa rendering below.







### **Pause & Ponder:**

*Say a prayer that the cleanup efforts will be successful. There will be a rebirth of a natural habitat of wildflowers, vernal pond and a sustaining environment for both man and wildlife.*

### **Current and Future state:**

Due to the pollution, this area became an undesirable place to live. There are no grocery stores in the area, only corner stores that don't have refrigeration to store fresh produce. It is considered a "food desert". Once this area gets cleaned up, there will be opportunity to build a grocery store. Already, during the summertime on Tuesday evenings there is a "night market" with pop-up vendors.



Below is the proposed future rendering for this section of the Riverway trail, which includes an ADA accessible dock area for kayaks and canoes, a greenspace recreation area with pavilions and several interpretive trails:



As you retrace your steps on the way back to your car, consider all the changes man has made to this area. Soldiers trained here. Railroads and canals were built and eroded. A bustling oil refinery allowed a few families to become very wealthy. Was it worth contaminating the area for future residents?

**Final prayer:** *Lord, with your grace we will become true pilgrims of hope for all of Creation. In your kindness, we ask you to send us forward as a “leaven of authentic hope” for all of humanity, sharing your Good News, helping humanity regain its trust in each other, and continuing to promote the dignity of all persons and respect for God’s gift of Creation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## **Other Sections of the Genesee Riverway Trail we recommend.**

### **#1. High Falls** in downtown, Rochester

View from the Pont deRennes pedestrian bridge.



### **#2. Lower and Middle Falls.**

Park at the Maplewood Rose Garden.

Push the button at the crosswalk before crossing Driving Park. A good view of the Lower Falls can be seen from the Driving Park Bridge before you enter the park. Walk down a gradual hill on a paved walkway.

As you descend, the road noise will become replaced by the roar of the 110 foot waterfall. You will be surrounded by the river to the east, and cliffs to the west. The city noise will become inaudible. You'll hear only the rush of the water, the rustle of leaves and the songs of birds.



The Lower Falls Park itself is only .25 of a mile long with a paved walkway that loops around it. In the center is a sculpture commemorating the diversity of the people who live and have lived in the area.

As you head southward, you'll notice the remains of the wall of McCrackenville - an industrial area of paper mills, carpet, furniture and tanneries to name just a few. There are some historical markers about the mill and the history of the area.



The southern end of Lower Falls Park links to a RG&E hydro-electric facility. Although there is a dam and man-made structures along this part of the river, you can view the 40 foot waterfall from the shore right next to it, with historical plaques highlighting the hydro-electric process that has been active since 1917.



**#3. Maplewood Rose Garden:**



#### **#4. Genesee Pedestrian Bridge**

Crosses the river from Seneca Park on the eastern bank. Access from the Maplewood Park on the west bank is currently closed. Google “Genesee Riverway Bridge” to view a video.

#### **#5. Turning Point Park:**

Boardwalk over the river. Calm, serene setting.

Access from Boxart Street off Lake Ave. Steep descent.

The approach from south or north along the riverway trail is more gradual, but may be better suited for a bicycle ride than for a walk .





