

Native Americans in the Glen

A major Indian trail passed through the glen

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The Search for Rochester's Earliest Inhabitants
 On the Trail with George Harris, The Pathfinder
 By William T. Davis

One hundred years ago George H. Harris wrote for William F. Peck's *Semi-Centennial History of Rochester* the first fifteen chapters entitled "The Aboriginal History of Rochester." Who was this man? Some said he was Rochester's Henry David Thoreau. Blake McKelvey declared that he was Rochester's most capable amateur historian. The Senecas, who made him an honorary member of the Wolf Clan, called him "Ho-tar-shan-nyoh" — the PATHFINDER. What started him on his life time pursuit?

Our knowledge of Harris comes from his section in Peck's history; manuscripts and newspaper articles in the Harris collection at the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library; manuscripts in the Department of Rare Books in Rush Rhees Library; and from several articles and references in the *Publication Fund Series* of the Rochester Historical Society. Still a mystery is the location of Harris' extensive collection of several thousand carefully cataloged artifacts.

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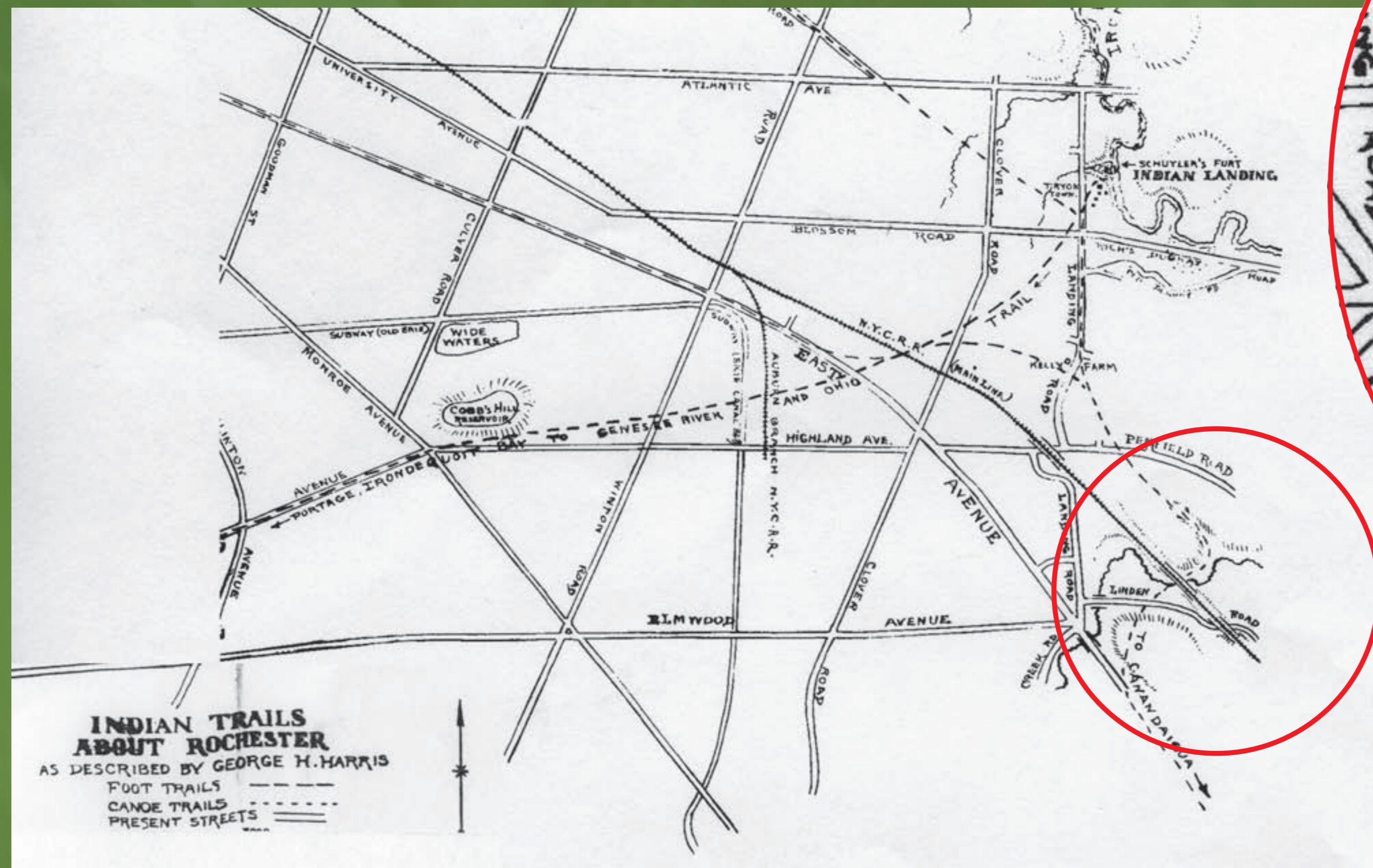
"The main trail of the Iroquois extended from Hudson, on the Hudson river below Albany, westwardly to Buffalo, crossing the Genesee at Cannawaugus-now Avon. From Canandaigua lake a branch ran northwest to the head of Irondequoit bay, then to the Genesee falls, and along the lake ridge to the Niagara river at Lewiston."

From William T. Davis article page 19 in "Rochester History" shown above

"The great trail coming west from Canandaigua on the present route of the Pittsford road divided a few rods east of Allen's creek. The main trail turned to the north over a low ridge, across the present farm of the venerable Charles M. Barnes and down a gully to Allen's creek. The ford was exactly at the arch through which the waters now pass under the great embankment of the New York Central railroad."

From William T. Davis article page 20 in "Rochester History" shown above

Map by noted local authority George H. Harris shows Seneca trail from Indian Landing to Canandaigua passing through the center of the Nature Park



A Native American burial ground was discovered in the "sand cut" 0.6 miles east of the glen when the sand was being excavated for use in railroad construction.

"... a large open path ran directly south over the hills to the Pittsford road, and thence to Honeoye. At its crossing of the New York Central railroad at the "sand-cut" east of the Allen's creek embankment, an Indian burial ground was located. During the excavation of a part of this hill, about 1876, human remains were exhumed, among which were several skeletons of unusual size, one exceeding seven feet in length. Numberless relics of stone, rusty knives and fragments of firearms were picked up by the workmen ..."

From William T. Davis article page 27 in "Rochester History" shown above

Between 1880 and the 1940's archeologists found evidence of ten pre-historic or archaic campsites surrounding the glen.

Brian Nagle – personal communication

A SPIRITUAL CONNECTION TO THE GLEN?

Onondagon Chief Paul Waterman of the Seneca Nation came here in 1992 to bless the glen. Once he got into the glen he remarked that when he entered the tunnel his bones began to shake and when he got further into the glen he felt at peace.

In 1993 a similar experience was reported by Sher Bechtold when she visited the glen for the first time. An excerpt from a letter she wrote is quoted below with permission.

*Dear Deb, Jeff, and Scott,
 Thank you for sharing your music and your musical instruments with our club ...*

I must tell you something. I am of Iroquois and Cherokee (and Anglo!) Blood, and when I first set-foot on your land, I felt a shiver and a vibration travel from the earth up through my heels, through my body, across my shoulders, and out the top of my head!

There is something special about your place. There are Spirits here that are very strong, and they are very pleased and happy that you are living here, caring for things. ...I'm sure there are many of my ancestors here. I can feel them!

*Most Sincerely,
 Sher Bechtold*