

Written by
Jim Memmott

Good News column: Walter Hubbell, others named to list of remarkable Rochesterians

In business, in politics, in life, it's not always just what you know, it's also whom you know. And **Walter Hubbell, a Rochester lawyer** who was born in 1850 and died at age 81 in 1932, knew everyone. His friends list included Theodore Roosevelt, George Eastman, Susan B. Anthony, Booker T. Washington and John D. Rockefeller.

For his scope of influence and for his contributions to life in Rochester, **Hubbell** certainly deserves a spot on the list of remarkable Rochesterians that we expand at the beginning of each month.

This month, in addition to **Hubbell**, we'll honor two educators, a heretic, a poet, a skier and a comedian. That's a disparate group, but what they all have in common is a Rochester connection. It counts for a lot.

First, a little more about **Hubbell**:

A graduate of the University of Rochester who served in the New York state Assembly with Roosevelt and became the future president's friend, **Hubbell** was a vice president of the Eastman Kodak Co. and Eastman's trusted adviser.

He was a longtime member of UR's board of trustees, and he also started the law firm that would morph into what is now Nixon Peabody. In addition to all of this, he was the leader of a Bible-study class that became nationally known.

Two presidents

One of **Walter Hubbell's** many achievements as a member of UR's board was to engineer a fund drive that convinced Benjamin Rush Rhees to remain as the university's president.

Rhees, who was born in 1860 and died in 1939, served as president from 1900 to 1935, during which time the Eastman School of Music was created and UR's main campus moved to its current site along the Genesee River.

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One-time Abraham Lincoln presidential opponent Stephen Douglas once lived in Manchester.

MANCHESTER — Matthew Uttaro has been watching history documentaries since he was a little kid.

He doesn't know why he's so enthralled with the topics of yore, but history — he is particularly enamored with American but he has more than a passing interest in the world's past — has always been a passion for him.

And so when he learned that Stephen A. Douglas, the former Illinois senator, rival of President Abraham Lincoln and famed orator (remember the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates from history class?), lived in the town of Manchester for several years, Matthew was hooked.

“Stephen Douglas was huge in American history. How could I not enhance local history?” he said, so that’s what he’s trying to do.

As part of his Eagle Scout project, Matthew, who is a member of Canandaigua Troop 30, is trying to raise \$1,300 to purchase a historical marker and have it erected. The hope is to have the marker in hand by March and in the ground by May 1.

“I’m pretty excited about it,” he said.

According to Preston Pierce, Ontario County historian and museum educator at the Ontario County Historical Society, Douglas lived in Manchester for several years after his mother married Gehazi Granger and moved from Vermont.

This was about 1830.

Douglas left the farm on Stephens Street Extension, just west of Clifton Springs, so that he could attend Canandaigua Academy, **read law with Walter Hubbell in his Niagara Street, Canandaigua office** and moved to Illinois around 1834. That’s when he began work as a railroad attorney and entered politics, according to information provided by Pierce.

During the 1860 presidential campaign, Douglas paid a visit to Clifton Springs and the Messenger reported 25,000 people attended a rally for him there, according to Pierce. The residence in Manchester is a little known part of the Douglas story, Pierce said.

“The new marker will complement the preservation of the Hubbell law office at Granger Homestead and Douglas’ portrait in the courthouse,” Pierce said in an email.

Matthew, who is the son of Paula and Sal Uttaro of Manchester, is active in the school’s theater department and notes that rehearsals for the production of “Ragtime” have just started. He plays trombone and sings and has been accepted at five colleges.

Wherever he decides on going, Matthew said he plans to study history and adolescent education. “I’m a complete history nerd,” he said. “I openly admit that.”

To help

The Ontario County Historical Society is acting as fiscal agent for Matthew Uttaro’s marker service project. To make a tax-deductible contribution, send a check made payable to the society, 55 N. Main St., Canandaigua NY 14424. All of the contributions will go toward the purchase of the marker and its installation.



Walter S Hubbell's house in Rochester, NY

Walter Hubbell and Theodore Roosevelt

UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER LIBRARY BULLETIN

Volume XIV · Winter 1959 · Number 2

Walter Hubbell and Theodore Roosevelt

--CATHERINE HAYES

In the late Walter Sage Hubbell, Rochesterians recognize a true leader in the legal, civic, and religious history of their city. They remember him as a brilliant corporation lawyer, top legal counsel to George Eastman, and as founder and teacher of the nationally admired Hubbell Bible Class. Yet, one of the most interesting associations in his life was given but scant mention in biographies and newspaper articles at the time of his death in 1932. This was his friendship with former Governor of New York State and President of the United States Theodore Roosevelt.

Last October an exhibit was placed on display in the foyer of Rush Rhees Library in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Theodore Roosevelt. Among the items which attracted wide attention was a small group of letters from President Roosevelt to Walter Hubbell, written when both were young men and relatively new on the political scene in Albany. These letters form the major part of a gift of a selection of the papers of Walter Hubbell, presented to the Library several years ago by his daughters, the late Misses Anna and Bertha Hubbell. These manuscripts, plus letters published in the *New York Tribune* in the summer of 1884 and in *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* edited by Elting E. Morison (Harvard University Press, 1951-1954), reveal the

relationship of the two.

The Roosevelt-Hubbell friendship was started in 1883 shortly after Hubbell was elected to the State Assembly. The future president had been in the State Legislature two years when Hubbell arrived on the Albany scene. Hubbell was thirty-three that year; Roosevelt, twenty-five. During the coming session Hubbell became a member of Roosevelt's political "set." This "set" was young and doggedly loyal to Roosevelt in his fight for reform in government.

The Library does not have copies of letters from Hubbell to Roosevelt, but a letter written by Hubbell in behalf of Roosevelt was published in the August 2, 1884, edition of the *New York Tribune*. In this letter the Rochesterian revealed his great loyalty to Roosevelt. Roosevelt, when Hubbell first met him, was eager, ambitious, and aware that each contact was important to his future political ambitions. In an early letter written to Hubbell on November 12, 1883, and found in the Morison collection, Roosevelt said:

"Dear Sir—Although not personally acquainted with you, I take the liberty of writing to state that I am a candidate for Speaker. Last year, when we were in the minority, I was the party nominee for that position; and if you can consistently support me I shall be greatly obliged. Hoping to hear from you at your convenience, I am very truly yours."

Roosevelt did not win designation as Speaker; but, as Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Affairs of Cities, he made an indelible mark on the record of the 1884 legislative session. During this session he pushed his fight for political recognition vigorously. He battled endlessly for passage of nine New York City and County reform bills. He created an image of himself as a "reform" legislator who took action while a "reform" governor (Cleveland) and his fellow Democrats hindered and vetoed reform legislation.

As the session progressed, the political friendship between Hubbell and Roosevelt blossomed. Hubbell became a staunch defender of the Roosevelt reform bills, as is particularly evident in his 1884 letter to the *Tribune*:

"In speaking of Mr. Theodore Roosevelt's career in the Assembly last Winter, the magazine [*The Nation*] wrote 'He [Roosevelt] accomplished the good he did accomplish, let us assure him, not through the Republican party from which he got hardly a dozen willing votes during the whole of last Winter...'

"The above statement was made, as shown from the context, to prove that the Republican party and the Republican legislature of 1884 deserves no credit for the reform measures that were passed last Winter and both the spirit and the letter of the statement are false."

Hubbell went on to describe the various delaying tactics employed by the Democratic members of the Assembly in order to prevent a vote on the reform bills. He wrote that, after a motion finally was passed to permit a vote on the bills:

"The scene that followed beggars description. A howling mob of Democrats rushed from their seats and assembled in 'the well' in front of the clerk's desk and with yells, hisses and denunciations attempted to drown the voice of the chairman and obstruct the progress of the bills ...

"When, at last the vote on agreeing with the report of the committee was counted, it was found that out of the 65 who voted in the affirmative only three were Democrats. Slowly but surely each of the other bills was progressed by about the same affirmative vote, though the Democrats continued to interpose dilatory motions and attempted to leave the House without a quorum by rushing outside the bar, like a parcel of little boys, every time a vote was about to be taken...

"I have given but a brief synopsis of the history of the bills, but I have given enough to show that they were triumphantly carried through by Republican votes in spite of Democratic opposition. . .

"The pluck and integrity of Theodore Roosevelt cannot be too highly praised. The men who are slandering him because he does not follow their dictation and turn his back upon the party whose representatives stood by him last Winter, are cowards in comparison.

"They flatter themselves that they created a public sentiment that wafted these bills through the Assembly. . .

"The Nation once knew how to be fair. Let it give the Republican legislature which passed these bills as much credit at least as it gives to a Democratic governor for signing some of them."

Editorially, on July 26, 1884, the *Tribune* referred to one of Roosevelt's bills—the Tenure of Office bill—writing:

"Governor Cleveland evidently thought to conceal his real motive in vetoing the Tenure of Office bill by using strong language, 'Of all the defective and shabby legislation which has been presented to me this is the worst.'

"He either acted in ignorance or vetoed the bill to shield Commissioner Thompson [Hubert O. Thompson, Commissioner of New York Public Works, who could have lost his position through enactment of the bill] whose support was necessary to further the Governor's political ambition..."

The *Tribune* termed Cleveland's veto "a disgraceful abandonment of the reform sentiment which he professed."

Roosevelt was quick to show his appreciation to Hubbell for the *Tribune* letter. On August 14, 1884, he wrote:

"Dear Walter—I just saw your letter in the) *New York Tribune*. Thanks for your more than kind allusions to me; the majority of my constituents just at present regard me as a full cross between Beelzebub and Judas Iscariot.

"I am off for the Bighorn Mountains tomorrow; do write me a few lines once or twice during the campaign, as I cannot tell from here anything about how things are going on in the political field. I am out of politics for the present, I guess. The attacks of the Independents trouble me very little indeed; I am a Republican and heartily distrust and disbelieve in the Democracy; though I confess Blaine was a bitter pill to swallow and I don't pretend to say I enjoy the doses."

Roosevelt's reference to James G. Blaine concerned Blaine's Republican candidacy for President.

With this letter to Hubbell, Roosevelt enclosed another with the suggestion that Hubbell send it on to the *New York Tribune*. Hubbell did, but not before carefully editing Roosevelt's spelling. The Library has the original letter, written August 14, 1884, which was published in the *Tribune* of August 21, 1884. In part, without any text corrections, this is the letter:

Chimney Butte Ranche
Little Missouri, Dakotah

"Hon. Walter S. Hubbell, Dear Sir:

"I have just seen your letter, dated July 26th, in the *New York Tribune*, and I wish to corroborate, with all possible emphasis, what you said wrote in relation to the work of last year's Republican Legislature. Every reform measure was put through only by receiving the cordial support of the great bulk of the Republicans, and in spite of the most determined opposition on the part of the great mass of the Democrats. The aldermanic bill, for example, was absolutely non partisan in character; indeed if anything it bore most heavily against the Republican party, whose stronghold in New York City has been in the board of aldermen, through which alone, for the most part, have Republicans in the past been able to obtain local office; yet in spite of this 58 Republicans and but 12 democrats were recorded in the affirmative on the final passage of the bill. So with the bills reported by the Special Investigating Committee in relation to the county offices. Too much praise can not be given to Messrs Nelson and Welch, the two Democratic members of that committee, for their conduct while upon it; but when the bills were brought into the house their fellow Democrats almost to a man opposed the measure, and on more than one occasion they were ~~left absolutely~~ the only two democratic votes recorded in favor of the bills, while on the other hand, all of the Republicans, with half a dozen exceptions did what they could to assist in their passage. Governor Cleveland certainly shines by comparison with the Democratic members of the Legislature; but ~~all~~ it must be remembered that he simply ~~ratified~~ assented to what had been previously carefully worked out and—perfected by the Republican Senate and Assembly. It is much easier to ratify than to originate—especially if the ratification is but partial. "But two of the Reform bills were at all partisan in their character. One was the Bureau of Elections bill, which affected a Republican; the other was the ~~Bureau~~ Tenure of Office bill, which ~~mainly affected~~ a where the chief official affected was a Democrat. Of course in passing these two bills I had to rely mainly upon Democratic votes in the first case and upon Republican votes in the second. Only five Democrats voted for the Tenure of Office bill while 28 twenty eight Republicans voted aye when the Bureau of Elections bill was up; and the latter only failed because barely half the Democrats were recorded in its favor — for the Democrats ~~could~~ can be trusted to invariably walk in the darkness even when to walk in the light would be manifestly to their advantage.

"I do not seek to palliate the conduct of the Republican legislature in not passing this bill; its defeat was due to purblind partisanship, and the Republican Assembly deserved and received, severe censure for its conduct; but an even greater meed of blame should be awarded to Governor Cleveland for his action in not signing the

Tenure of Office bill.

"I have carefully read his message ~~in relat~~ giving his reasons for for not allowing this measure to become a law; ~~and~~ they certainly seem to me to be frivolous; and it is difficult to believe that they were offered in good faith and that the bill would not have been signed if it had hurt only a Republican or a Tammany ~~man~~ chief, and not the powerful leader of the County Democracy..

"The aldermanic bill was robbed of most of its immediate importance when the Tenure of Office bill failed; its effects can not now be much felt for a couple of years. Such being the case the measure should certainly not have been killed on account of trivial verbal inaccuracies. The governor had previously returned six of the other municipal reform measures for verbal correction; but as it turned out most of the errors ~~he poin~~ to which he called attention were in those portions of the bills which merely recited without change or amendment the original law, which had been on the statute book for years, and with which our ~~bills~~ measures, had ~~not~~-really nothing to do...

"Governor Cleavland deserves great credit for ~~some of his official~~ the courage and honesty he displayed in some of his official acts; notably when he vetoed the 5 cent fare bill; but the chief credit for the reform measures of last year belongs to the Republican Legislature, and not to him; and while the former must bear the blame of failing to pass the Bureau of Elections bill, on the Governor alone rests the responsibility for the failure of the infinitely more important Tenure of Office bill.

"There is an old Latin proverb to the effect that among the blind the one eyed is king; certainly most Democrats are blind; and I am bound to confess that there are quite ~~a quite~~ a number of Republicans who are to say the least very nearsighted; but neither of these facts warrants us in stating that Governor Cleavland has two eyes, without ~~of~~ much better proof than is afforded by his conduct in relation to the Municipal Reform bills at the close of the last session. You

Very Truly Yours
Theodore Roosevelt

are at liberty to make what use you see fit of this letter.

Very Truly Yours
Theodore Roosevelt"

In the next legislative year of 1885, Hubbell, a sophomore assembly-man, made a stab at election as Speaker of the Assembly. He was backed for the position by followers of President Chester A. Arthur. Arthur was running for nomination as Senator from New York State, but his campaign fell by the wayside.

With Arthur's campaign a failure, Hubbell withdrew as a candidate for Speaker. George Z. Erwin was eventually elected Speaker. One report says Erwin was given "additional winning prestige" because of his activity in aiding Roosevelt's reform legislation. Although unsuccessful in his bid for the speakership, Hubbell was not ignored in committee assignments and was named Chairman of the General Laws Committee. He also introduced the law creating the state reservation at Niagara Falls.

Hubbell apparently fought to keep his political career alive, but it ended in 1885. In Morison's collection of Roosevelt letters there is one written to Hubbell, June 8, 1885:

"Dear Hubbell, Your note will be considered strictly confidential. I really have not given a single thought to my taking a place on the state ticket this fall; I shall let you know at once if such an idea enters my head, but I do'n't think it all probable unless for some reason it should seem best to outsiders. I do'n't know anything about H's plans; do'n't you think Lieut. Goy, would be rather high game for his hawks to fly at? Now, old boy, I hope there will be no rivalry among us younger members for any position; of course I shall back you for anything, unless it is a fight between you and some other one of 'our set'; and then I hardly know what course to pursue; I would like to know the views of one or two other of the boys before settling it. Always yours..."

Hubbell did not run for any office in 1885, but apparently had eyed nomination as a State Senatorial candidate. Roosevelt wrote him November 3, 1885:

"Dear Walter, I did not mind the broken arm in the least; it was fortune of war; and it did not keep me an hour in the house.

"I was awfully sorry you missed the Senate; what a set of scoundrels we have got there this year!

"Well, the cleanest ticket any party ever put up has just been defeated; and the mugwumps are responsible for it. They have nearly, if not quite, succeeded in ruining the infinitely superior one of the two dominant parties; and they now find that it is easier to destroy than to build up. Always yours, Theodore Roosevelt."

Roosevelt "retired" from public life for almost two years after the deaths of his wife and mother and his sharp disappointment in the nomination of Blaine for President. After two years of ranching in the West he was back in New York City and a candidate for Mayor. He wrote Hubbell on October 20, 1886:

"My dear Walter: I thank you most heartily for your kind note. I am up to my ears in work and so can send but a line in reply.

"I took the nomination merely because the Republican leaders were very anxious I should.

"Be sure and let me see you if you come to New York. Always faithfully yours, Theodore Roosevelt."

After he was defeated in the contest for Mayor, Roosevelt was appointed a member of the State Civil Service Commission. In this role he received several letters from Hubbell, who was seeking appointments for different residents of Monroe County. Answers to these requests are among the last original Roosevelt to Hubbell letters found in the Special Collections files. They were written in 1889 and 1890. Roosevelt made no promises to Hubbell, but did state that the persons in question would be "treated, as far as this office is concerned, with absolute justice. .

These letters complete the Library's record of the Hubbell-Roosevelt friendship, which continued until Roosevelt's death in 1918.

[The Library appreciates the kindness of Mr. William M. Cruikshank in granting permission to publish the Roosevelt letters of August 14, 1884, November 3, 1885, and October 20, 1886, and of the Harvard University Press in granting permission to publish the letters of November 12, 1883, and June 8, 1885.]

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Hubbell, Walter Sage

Title: WALTER SAGE HUBBELL PAPERS

Date range: 1844-1932

Location: A.H87

Size: 1 box, 4 scrapbooks

Walter Sage Hubbell (born Cincinnati, Ohio, December 24, 1850; died Rochester, New York, January 1, 1932) graduated from the University of Rochester, Class of 1871. He was a lawyer in Rochester, a trustee of the University from 1895 until his death, an officer in the Eastman Kodak Company and active in local church work.

The papers consist of four large scrapbooks containing original letters (including some from his friend George Eastman), photographs, newspaper clippings, programs, etc. relating to Hubbell and his life, family and career. Also with the papers are eighteen letters and telegrams not with the scrapbooks from such people as Theodore Roosevelt (10 items), William C. Bryant (1 item), Booker T. Washington (1 item) and Susan B. Anthony (1 item). These eighteen letters are indexed in the Department's card catalog index to individual manuscripts.

Gift of Mr. Hubbell's daughter, Anna Hubbell (the eighteen letters), 1949, and deposit of his daughter, Margaret Hubbell Wells (the four scrapbooks), 1959.

Contents of Box 1 are reproductions of originals, gift of Tony Wells, received October, 2009.

Box 1

1. Biographical information on Walter Sage Hubbell from University of Rochester
2. Correspondence - 1885-1932
3. Walter Sage Hubbell - 0 years a Director of the Eastman Kodak Company - In Memoriam
4. Lincoln-Alliance Bank and Trust Co. August 24, 1932
5. Hubbell-Taylor years (1911-1939)
6. Last Will and Testament of Patrick O'Connor
7. Nixon, Hargrave, Devans, & Doyle, Rochester, NY
8. Kodak Magazine- Obituary
9. Colgate - Rochester Divinity School
10. Memorial Service First Baptist Church
11. Genesee Graduate Chapter - Alpha Delta Phi
12. Service Memory of Walter S. Hubbell address by Dr. Rush Rhees - January 24, 1932, University of Rochester
13. Newspaper clippings on death of Walter Sage Hubbell