

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Charles Finney's Rochester Revival

Timeline Event

THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION DATA ARCHIVES

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Founder: Charles Grandison Finney

Time Period: 09-01-1830 - 03-01-1831

Description

Evangelist Charles Grandison Finney held a powerful religious revival in Rochester, New York that lasted from September 1830 to March 1831. The revival showcased Finney's powerful preaching style, which he crafted and perfected after years of study and practice. His daily preaching and revival services moved listeners and led to public conversions, often of leading members of the community. Women and families helped to spread the news of the revival through home visits and prayer groups. Due to the ecumenical nature of the revival, many Protestants from multiple denominations traveled up to 100 miles to hear him preach.

This event served as the inspiration for several other revivals that spread across the Northeast and New England during the Second Great Awakening. Finney's preaching style served as a blueprint for future revivalists throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century.

Interactive Timeline(s)

- ↻ [Prominent Religious Events and People](#)
- ↻ [Presbyterian Events and People](#)

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Narrative

Evangelist Charles Grandison Finney, one of the foremost preachers and revivalists of the Second Great Awakening, was influenced by an array of theological traditions. He

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drew on the variety of New School Presbyterianism known as the New Divinity, which stressed people's ability to freely choose sin or salvation. Additionally, Finney's preaching style owed a debt to Baptists and Methodists.

Finney first brought his ministry to upstate New York in 1825, and over the next few years, he began perfecting what became known as "Finneyism," the distinctive form of revivals for which he would later gain notoriety in Rochester.

Rochester, in particular, stood out in this period and region for its rapid transformation into a commercial, manufacturing-oriented urban center. As a consequence, the once prevalent social and professional arrangement associated with artisanship and trades, specifically the mutuality between masters and apprentices, gave way to more strictly defined class stratification. Rochester also served as a center of what is known as the "Burned-Over District" in the antebellum period, which referred to the series of intense revivals that swept the area and which produced large numbers of conversions and the births of new churches.

Finney arrived in Rochester in late 1830, fittingly using the Erie Canal, both the symbol and engine of Rochester's commercial growth, as his mode of transportation. His Rochester revival lasted from September 1830 to March 1831, and while he was based in Presbyterian churches, the revival was notable for its ecumenical character. Finney's preaching attracted Protestants from multiple denominations, and he worked deliberately to effect this. The revival was certainly not confined to residents of Rochester. Numerous individuals from surrounding areas traveled from distances of up to one hundred miles to the city to hear Finney preach. When he was not preaching, Finney engaged in private prayer with members of the Rochester community who were seemingly close to conversion, and he relied especially on women and the familial and social networks of which they frequently served as important centers to spread the news of the revival through the establishment of home visits and prayer groups.

While this diffuse evangelization served as the foundation for community-wide conversions, Finney's daily preaching and revival services also played definitive roles in attracting new members to various churches. Finney had honed his preaching style almost scientifically after years of study and practice. After scriptural reading and powerful preaching, which prompted fervent feelings in congregations, individuals contemplating conversion, with whom Finney had already conversed in the private meetings that he pursued throughout the week, were made the focal points of the revivals by sitting on "anxious benches" near Finney's pulpit. These very public conversions, often of leading members of the community, gave added weight to the revival and Finney's message.

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According to historian Paul Johnson, the revival was especially significant for primarily attracting members of Rochester's emerging middle class, who then used their influence to evangelize the working class. Significantly, Finney's revival, with its emphasis on perfectionism and free moral choice, led to efforts directed toward social reform, especially temperance, which had a marked effect in influencing politics and business in Rochester. Finney had a direct hand in this. Halfway through the revival, he invited noted preacher and temperance activist [Theodore Dwight Weld](#) to join him in Rochester to organize temperance reform work. Beyond Rochester, Finney's revival served as the inspiration for several others that spread across the Northeast and New England during the Second Great Awakening, and Finney's preaching style served as a blueprint for future revivalists throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century.

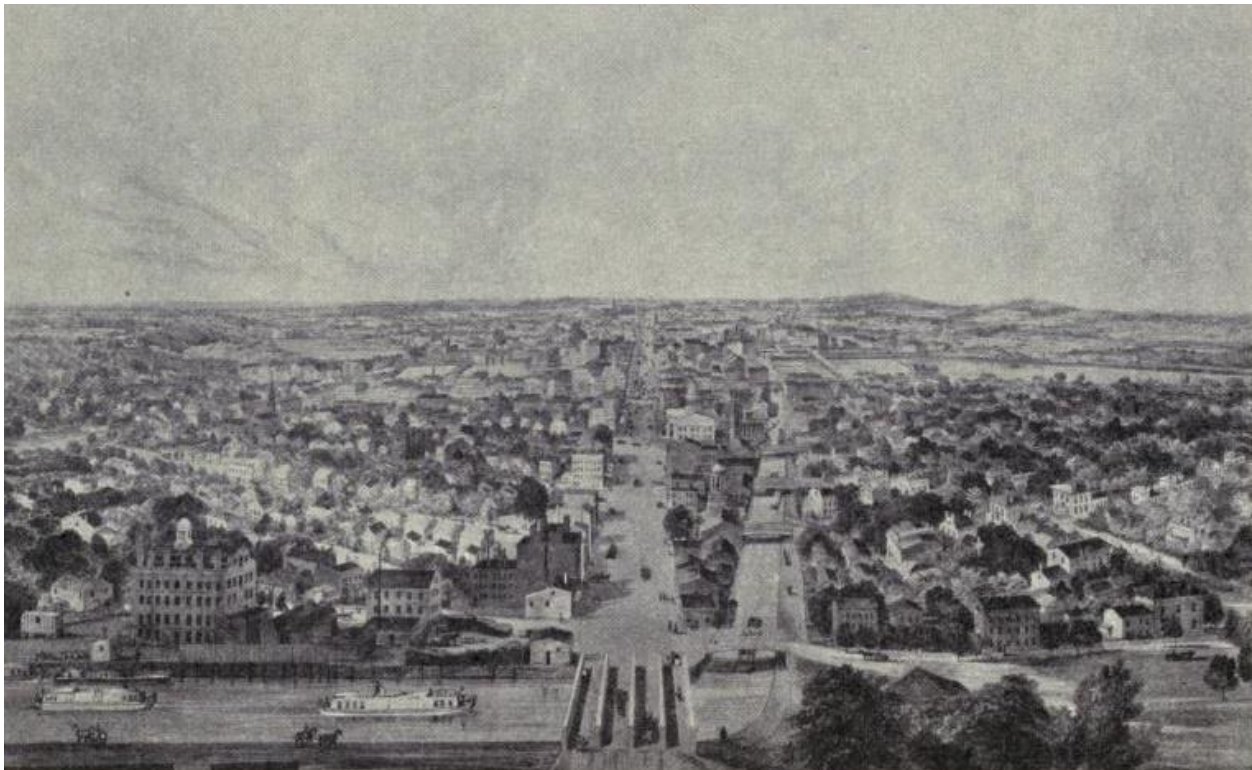
Religious Groups

- ✎ Presbyterian-Reformed Family: [Other ARDA Links](#)
- ✎ Presbyterian-Reformed Family: [Religious Family Tree](#)

Biographies: [Finney, Charles](#)

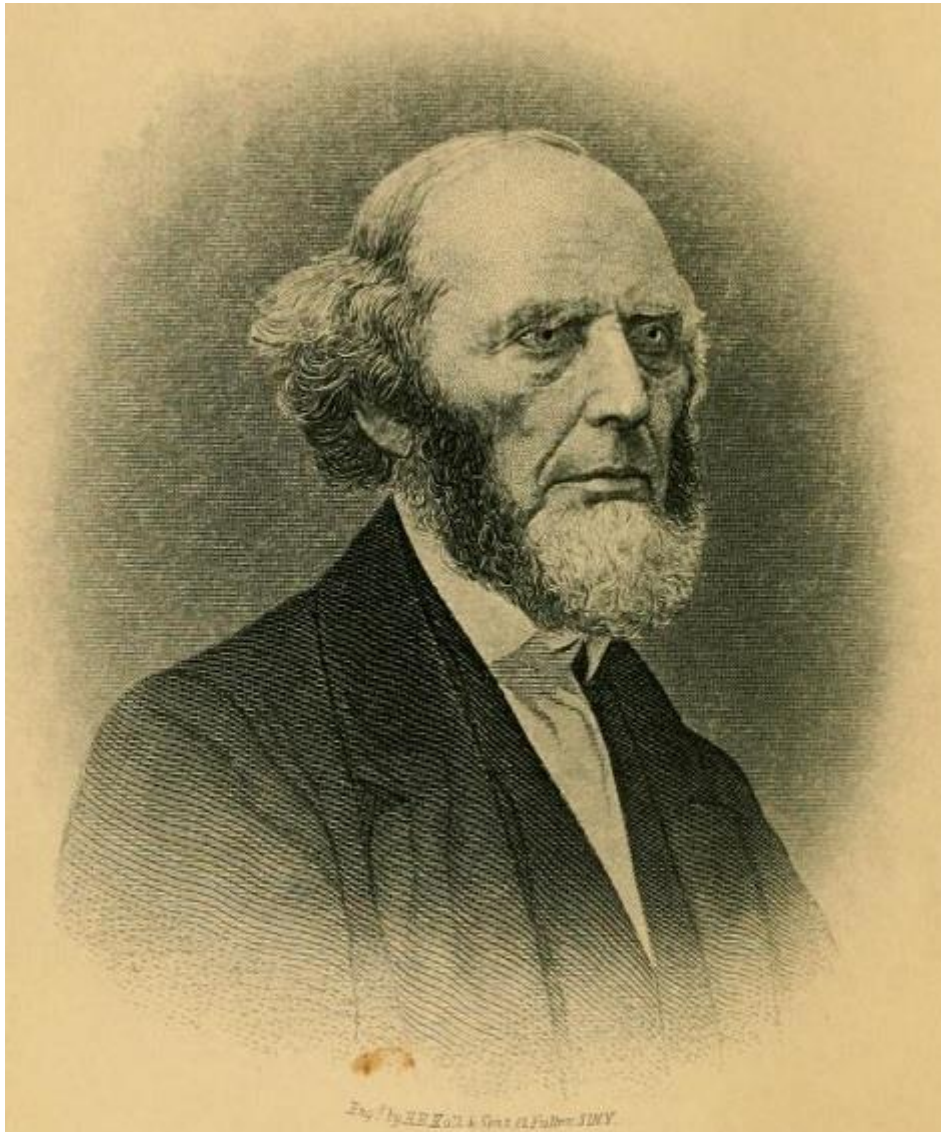
Movements: [The Second Great Awakening](#)

Photographs



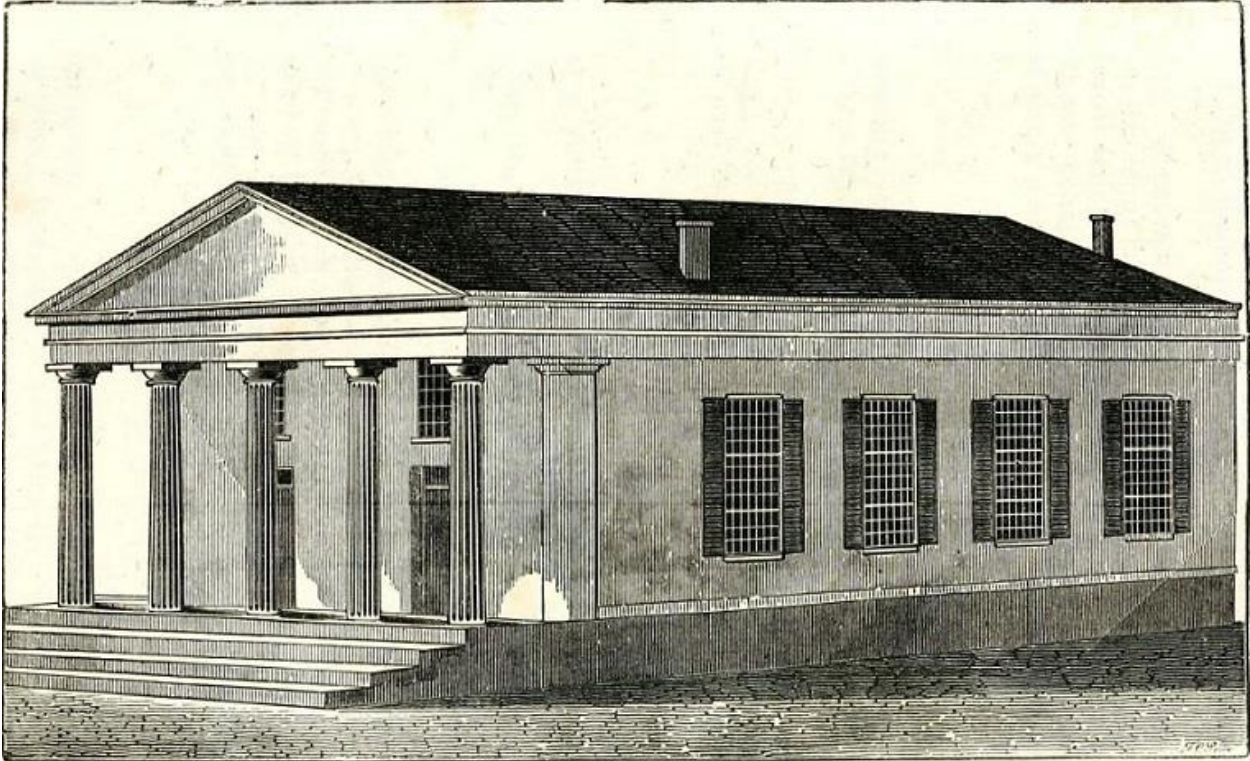
Rochester, New York- Internet Archive- from Rochester and Monroe County by Federal Writers' Project

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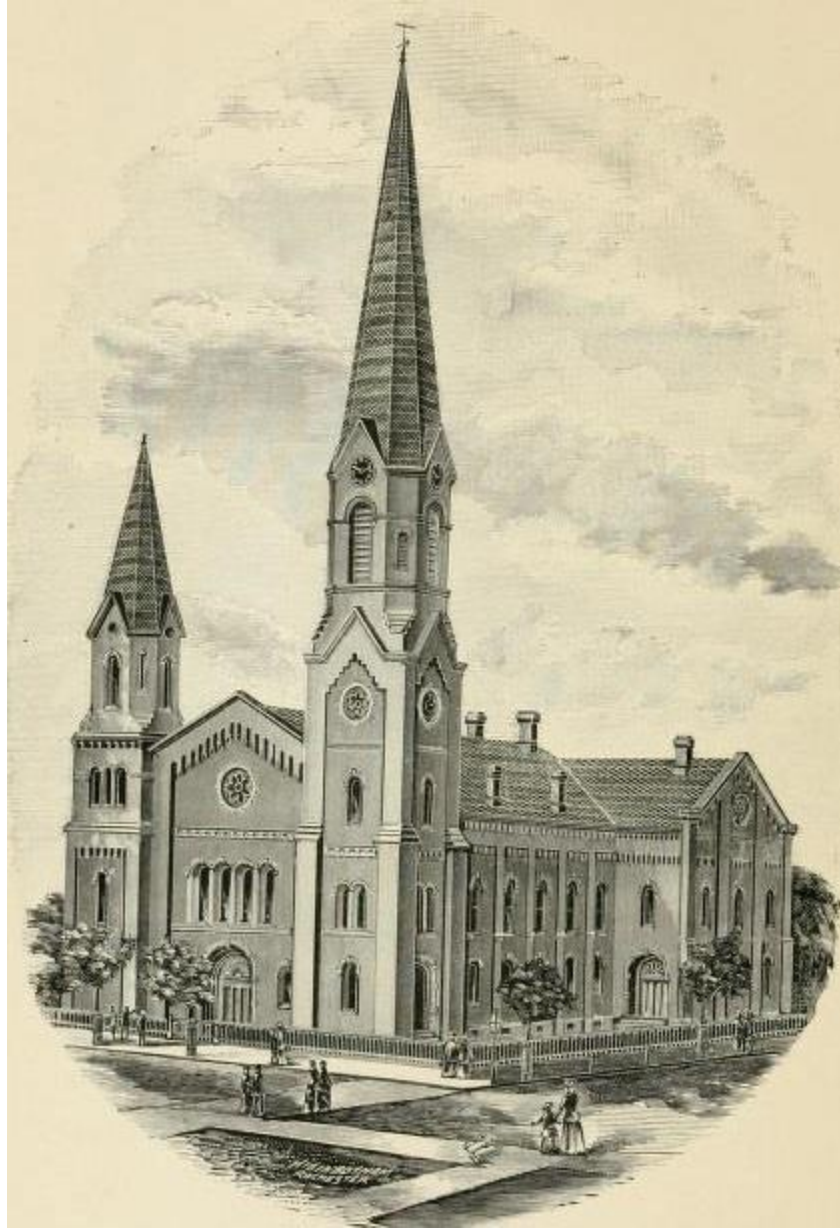
Charles Finney portrait- Internet Archive- from Memoirs of Rev

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Third Presbyterian Church, Rochester- Internet Archive- from Sketches of Rochester by Henry O'Reilly

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Brick Presbyterian Church, Rochester- Internet Archive- from History of the Rochester Presbytery by Levi Parsons

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Bissell Home where Finney stayed- Library of Congress, HABS NY,28-ROCH,14--2

Book/Journal Source(s)

Hambrick-Stowe, C.E., 2003. *Finney, Charles Grandison* Leicester, England, and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press. (Notes: In Timothy Larsen, D.W. Bebbington, and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*: 225-228.).

Hardman, Keith J., 1987. *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Johnson, Paul E., 1978. *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* New York: Hill and Wang.

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