Welcome to Kodak’s neighborhood! Rochester’s tradition of repurposing older buildings for new uses is most evident in this area, both a National Register Historic District and a city Preservation District. The tour of High Falls and Brown’s Race features a panoramic view of the Genesee River’s 96-foot falls and spectacular gorge plus a visit to an urban cultural park that celebrates Rochester’s earliest industrial area.
At State and Platt Streets you are virtually in the shadow of the Kodak Office Tower, 343 State Street. Kodak founder, George Eastman, was a bank clerk and amateur photographer when he set up a home workshop to manufacture a practical dry plate ready to sell to photographers. His original factory was farther south on State Street; he moved to this location in 1882. Eastman's Dry Plate and Film Company, which operated here in a four-story building, was organized in 1884. The 16-story Kodak Office Tower was built in 1914; three more floors, roof and cupola were added in 1930. Today, Kodak Office Tower is encased in additions, with numerous other Kodak facilities located throughout Rochester.

Kodak Office Tower is located in what originally was Frankfort, a 200-acre tract laid out in 1812 by Matthew and Francis Brown. In 1815-16 they created the area's first power canal, Brown's Race. In 1817 the newly incorporated Village of Rochesterville was formed by combining Frankfort and Colonel Rochester's adjacent 100-acre tract. Francis Brown became first president of the Village Board, while Matthew Brown, in 1821, became the first chairman of the Board of Supervisors of the newly formed Monroe County.

Walk south on State Street to the intersection of Platt Street.

At 294 and 300 State Street, diagonally across the street from Kodak Tower, you will find the former Rochester Button Company c. 1900. This early 20th-century company once was reputedly the world's largest manufacturer and distributor of buttons. At that time, buttons were made from "vegetable ivory," processed nuts imported from Mexico, South America and Africa.

From this point, look southeast on State Street for a view of WXXI.

Mill Street illustrates the intensity of industrial activity in the Brown's Race area during the latter half of the 19th century. Along this short street are buildings that once housed a tool factory, saw factories, machine works, a tobacco factory, a paper box factory and much more. All of the older buildings on Mill Street (except 208 Mill Street, built in 1826) were built or significantly modified during the 1870s and 1880s. Built of brick or stone, they feature many of the architectural fashions of their era. Several have mansard roofs; many still have their original multi-paned windows, as well as elaborate brick frieze bands and cornices.

A good example is 222-30 Mill Street, built in 1851 and modified in the 1870s, which shows loading doors with hoist and pulley on each floor. This four-story brick vernacular industrial building features seven bays and projecting cornice with corbelled frieze. Mechanics were employed here in the manufacture of patented machinery for making barrels.

Continue east along Platt Street.

On State Street is Rochester's public broadcasting station, WXXI. It has been in this neighborhood since 1974. Their facility was expanded in 1991.

Turn left and walk down Platt Street. The first intersection is Mill Street.
As you approach the Pont de Rennes, the former Platt Street Bridge, the Phoenix Mill Building at 104 Platt Street will be on your left. Initially, this site was the Harford Mill (1808), a gristmill on a small stream. Discouraged after several years, Charles Harford sold the mill to the Brown brothers and Thomas Mumford. The mill building was improved in 1812, but it burned in 1818. A replacement was constructed immediately, though it now shows the results of several rebuilding cycles occasioned by fire and partial demolition. The building features brick corbels and unusual twelve-light single-sash with thick wood muntins. Exterior walls are stone except for the brick south wall that was constructed after a large portion of the building was removed to build the bridge.

**Phoenix Mill Building**

The Pont de Rennes pedestrian bridge and park were created in 1982 from what was the Platt Street bridge (1891), an 858-foot-long, truss bridge.

**Pont de Rennes**

Starting about 10,000 years ago, deposits from the retreat of the last glacier diverted the Genesee to its present course. From Rochester to Lake Ontario, the river drops about 300 feet. Waterfalls occurred as the river met rock resistant to erosion. This main cataract—the 96-foot High Falls—one called the Upper Falls—was considered one of the wonders of the American wilderness. The 67-foot Lower Falls is about one mile downstream, near Driving Park Avenue. The gorge was created by the upstream migration of these falls.

**Genesee River Gorge (cont.)**

Rochester schoolchildren know the story of Sam Patch, a 19th-century daredevil, who had conquered Niagara Falls, but jumped from High Falls to his death on Friday the thirteenth of November, 1829. By the early 1800s, the Genesee River was supplying the power, initially via Brown’s Race, that made Rochester the flour capital of the world. Its commercial accessibility attracted millers, toolmakers and other settlers. At least nine of Rochester’s two dozen mills were situated on Brown’s Race. Rochester remained a flour-milling center until the 1880s, when production followed the migration of farmers to the Midwest. The last flour was milled at Brown’s Race in 1927.

**Genesee River Gorge and High Falls**

Rochester schoolchildren know the story of Sam Patch, a 19th-century daredevil, who had conquered Niagara Falls, but jumped from High Falls to his death on Friday the thirteenth of November, 1829. By the early 1800s, the Genesee River was supplying the power, initially via Brown’s Race, that made Rochester the flour capital of the world. Its commercial accessibility attracted millers, toolmakers and other settlers. At least nine of Rochester’s two dozen mills were situated on Brown’s Race. Rochester remained a flour-milling center until the 1880s, when production followed the migration of farmers to the Midwest. The last flour was milled at Brown’s Race in 1927.
On the northwest bank of the river gorge is Beebee Station of the Rochester Gas and Electric Company. One of RG&E’s predecessor companies established a combined stream and hydroelectric plant here in 1892. Beebee station produced electricity from coal, gas and oil. However, RG&E still uses Brown’s Race for hydroelectric power with a water turbine now housed in a block structure at the southwest base of High Falls.

Now look right (northeast) to the High Falls Brewing Company.

The High Falls Brewing Company, initially established as the Genesee Brewing Company in 1878, is located along the east bank of the gorge. The company stopped manufacture during prohibition but was reorganized by a former brewmaster, Louis A. Wehle, in 1933. Several former breweries are now part of this complex. As you retrace your steps and leave the bridge, notice how the backs of the buildings were built onto the gorge walls, where tailraces cut in the rock are also evident. During the milling years, water came from Brown’s Race and went through the buildings powering the water wheels and turbines of the area’s factories and mills.

Return from the bridge in the same direction you arrived. As you walk off the bridge, the first cross street you will see is Brown’s Race street. Turn left on Brown’s Race.

Brown’s Race, the power canal, was constructed in 1815. Today, a street called Brown’s Race follows the old raceway. Diverting water from a point about 500 feet south of High Falls, the raceway was 1221-feet long (later extended), 30 feet wide and five-and-a-half feet deep. Even before the race was completed, a cotton mill was constructed at a location that was once called Brown’s Island (north side of Commercial Street and east of the remaining raceway).

Spillways funneled water from the race through the mills. Mill lots between the race and the gorge each had the right to a certain amount of water from the race. All buildings on the east side of the race were reached via footbridges; overhead shafts transmitted power to the west side of the race and to the buildings, which fronted on Mill Street. Eventually, a wooden plank roadway covered the race. In 1991-1992 portions of the original Brown’s Race were uncovered; concrete planks delineate the original width of the raceway.

Look to the first building on your left.
The first building you will see on your left is the Center at High Falls, formerly the Rochester Water Works, 74-78 Brown’s Race, which now houses an urban cultural park exhibit center. Designed by Andrew J. Warner, the High Victorian Gothic building with distinctive cast-iron cornice was built in 1873 to provide high pressure water for fire fighting in downtown. It also once provided hydraulic power for downtown elevators, including those in the Powers Building.

Look to the adjacent building for the Brown’s Race Market.

Brown’s Race Market

Adjacent to the waterworks building is the Brown’s Race Market, developed in 1992 out of former RG&E maintenance buildings. It provides excellent viewing of the gorge and the adjacent Triphammer Forge site.

Continue down Brown’s Race and again look left to the Triphammer Forge site.

Triphammer Forge Site

A unique archaeological park, the Triphammer Forge site provides a good view of the layers of history found in Brown’s Race. The Triphammer Building burned in 1977. As the rubble was being cleared, a long-forgotten basement room was uncovered that housed the building’s massive (25-foot) water wheel, constructed of wood and iron.

The Triphammer Building was built as a forge in 1816 and occupied by the William Cobb Scythe and Tool factory. A large, heavy hammer—the triphammer—was raised by waterpower and dropped to forge wrought-iron tools. In 1830, the building was advertised for sale as having a furnace with the greatest blast in the state and two trihammers.

In the 1860s, the Triphammer Building and 208 Mill Street (Selye Fire Engine Company) were purchased by Junius Judson, inventor of the steam governor used in locomotives and ships. Judson expanded the Triphammer building another 75 feet toward the gorge edge. The wall with the large arch is part of this addition. The shaft of Judson’s water turbine was found in this addition. Appropriately, he also manufactured trihammers at the site. Judson’s son eventually became the first president of RG&E.

Now look directly across the street.

Selye Fire Engine Company

In the 1830s, Lewis Selye bought the Triphammer Building. Previously, in 1826 he had constructed the building at 208 Mill Street that extends between Brown’s Race and Mill Street. In these buildings the Selye Fire Engine Company built Rochester’s first fire engines and supplied fire engines for federal fortifications and other cities across New York State. A cast-iron shaft transferred power from the Triphammer Building to the Mill Street plant.

208 Mill Street best illustrates construction in Brown’s Race in its initial days. The lower two floors are coursed stone rubble while the upper two stories are random ashlar stone. Loading doors are evident on each floor along with hoist and pulley and iron tie rods.

As electricity and steam replaced waterpower in the 1880s and 1890s, Brown’s Race lost its strategic advantage for industrial uses. For example, the vacant lot south of the Triphammer site was once the location of the Gleason Works, internationally noted makers of beveled gears. No longer needing the falls for waterpower, Gleason moved to its current location on University Avenue in 1905 after fire destroyed its Brown’s Race plant.

Continue south to the end of Brown’s Race street. Directly in front of you is the original c. 1819 Brown’s Race, a power canal. Turn left on Commercial Street and proceed to the festival site, Gorsline Building and High Falls Viewing Terrace, adjacent to the river.
The Gorsline Building is located adjacent to the falls. A T-shaped structure, it was built in 1888 as a shoe factory, though the stonework on the lower portion shows evidence of earlier buildings. In 2000, this derelict building was transformed, with about a third of the building renovated for offices. For the remainder, the city of Rochester created at the top of the stone level a terrace for viewing the gorge. There also is a unique view of a pit that shows the race that once powered the building.

Walk back to Commercial Street, on your right will be the Rack House.

You are now standing on a bridge over the portion of Brown’s Race that remains as an active race. Here the race goes through the Rack House, at base of the gorge is RG&E’s hydroelectric station.

Continue down Commercial Street towards Mill Street.

The buildings at 60-64 Commercial Street (1880 building; window sash builder) and 190-192 Mill Street (1881 building; paper box factory) are associated with the district’s late 19th-century development. On your left, note 51-61 Commercial Street, built in the 1890s as the power house for the New York Railway Company.

This concludes the tour. To return to Kodak Tower, continue on Mill Street to State Street and turn right.