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The Annexation of Charlotte

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Among the suburban municipalities near Rochester early in the twentieth century, Charlotte stood in a unique relationship with the city. The incorporated Village of Charlotte, occupying about 800 acres on the west side of the Genesee River where the river empties into Lake Ontario, served as Rochester's port. It was this economic function which first gave rise, during the nineteenth century, to plans for the village's annexation by the city. During the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century, Charlotte's connections with the city were strongly reinforced as the lakeside village became Rochester's major summer resort and amusement center. Eventually, Charlotte's function as a "watering place" grew in importance to rival the significance of its role as transshipment point for lake commerce. By 1915, the quality of its services as an amusement center became as much an argument for annexation as schemes for the improvement of Rochester's shipping had been. Two sets of considerations, those relating to Charlotte as port and resort, were then successfully pressed by advocates of annexation, despite the fact that Charlotte's southern edge was some four miles distant from the city's nearest boundary line.

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A Lakeside Village

More than a century before annexation, some early promoters and settlers believed that Charlotte, not Rochester, would become the major city of the lower Genesee. Rochester's sudden rise in the early decades of the nineteenth century depended largely on development of the Genesee's water power, but full scale exploitation of that mill power awaited completion of the Erie Canal through Rochester in 1823. Before that time, the falls of the Genesee, several miles inland from the river mouth, were regarded as much a hindrance to commerce as a potential source of power.¹ The products of the Genesee Country were carried downstream by raft as far as the rapids just above the main falls. Here began a difficult portage to one of several landings with access to the lucrative lake trade: Tryon Town at the foot of Irondequoit Bay, Fall Town in the river gorge midway between the rapids and the river mouth, or Charlotte. Permanent settlement at Charlotte predated similar developments in Nathaniel Rochester's village by fully twenty years.² Moreover, during those twenty years (1792-1812), Charlottesburg, as it was sometimes called, gained ascendancy over its shipping rivals, largely as the result of bad luck in the neighboring settlements. The pioneers of Fall Town were decimated by epidemic fever. The mouth of Irondequoit Bay became silted over, discouraging development at Tryon Town. By 1805, when federal authorities designated Charlotte a Port of Entry and appointed the first customs collector for the district of the Genesee,³ goods that left Tryon for distant cities were carried first on lighters to Charlotte for transshipment. Within a few years Charlotte became the principal settlement on the lake between Oswego and Lewiston, and controlled an expanding export business in frontier produce demanded in Canadian ports.⁴

But the completion of the Erie Canal in the early 1820s shifted much of western New York's commerce away from the lakes and toward inland routes. During Rochester's "flour city" period in the second and third quarters of the century, the lake trade played only a supplementary role to the inland commerce carried first by canal and later by railroad. Though the volume of lake exports would continue to increase in an absolute sense for some time, it could not keep pace with the expansion of the inland trade. Moreover, Charlotte's economic importance declined not only in relation to Rochester's canal and railroad traffic, but also in comparison with other lake ports, notably Oswego and Buffalo.⁵ If the economic potential of Charlotte often seemed neglected, at least part of the reason, until the mid-nineteenth century, was its isolation from Rochester. The few intervening miles between Rochester and Charlotte were interrupted by rugged terrain which featured deep ravines. Not until 1849 was the dirt trail to Charlotte improved by a plank road company, and not until 1854 was Charlotte served by a steam railroad.⁶

A succession of steamship companies, under either Canadian or American ownership, made repeated attempts to promote trade at Charlotte during the second half of the nineteenth century. Their efforts were only partly successful, as the economies of both North American nations continued to become more self-sufficient during this period and east-west commerce was diverted to the railroads. In terms of value of imports, the record year at Charlotte was 1855, when over one and a half million dollars in goods was reported (much of it western grain for Rochester's flour mills).⁷

In 1882, the Rochester and Charlotte Turnpike Company completed an improved toll road to the village which stimulated its use as a home for summer cottagers.⁸ Two years later a small group of Rochester and Charlotte businessmen formed the Ontario Beach Improvement

Company with the financial encouragement of the New York Central Railroad. The new venture was intended to exploit Charlotte's potential as a resort, an undertaking which was eminently successful. The company constructed a resort hotel on a grand scale on real estate fronting the lake beach and the river, added a large pavillion, bandshells, and other improvements, and began reaping large profits. Independence Day in 1885 brought a crowd of 20,000 to Charlotte, many of whom rode special trains from the city. The *Rochester Union and Advertiser* observed, "Saturday's mammoth crowd at the lake shows that some things can be done as well as others" – an accurate paraphrase of Sam Patch's famous maxim.⁹ The pre-eminence of Charlotte as a lakeside resort was assured, in 1889, by the extension of electric trolleys north from the city along the boulevard. Other beach places – Manitou, Grandview, and Crescent beaches to the west of Charlotte; and Summerville, White City, and Sea Breeze on the east side of the river – were subsequently connected by electric railway to Charlotte rather than directly to the city.¹⁰

While the development of its resort facilities became the dominant theme in Charlotte's late nineteenth century history, other events there were not without importance. Throughout the century Charlotte's industrial activities were, by and large, restricted to small-scale enterprises typical of village life, such as blacksmithing, fruit processing, and barrel making.¹¹ But in 1869, the year of village incorporation, a group of Rochester entrepreneurs constructed a blast furnace at Charlotte for the manufacture of pig iron. The Rochester Iron Manufacturing Company was an oddity in the economic history of the city. Heavy or primary industries found little place in Rochester's economic mix because of location and the city's disadvantages compared to places like Pittsburgh, Toledo, or urban New Jersey. The promoters of the Charlotte blast furnace enjoyed a tenuous success most years owing, no

doubt, to the ready market for iron among Rochester's numerous foundries. The blast furnace was forced to close down at the beginning of the depression of 1893 and operated sporadically thereafter until its destruction in 1927.¹² While in operation its feasibility depended on the conjunction of rail lines and port facilities in Charlotte, for the carriage of its bulky raw materials and heavy finished product.

That same conjunction of rail and water stimulated another enterprise at Charlotte in this period which was less dramatic but more firmly rooted in economic realities. Harbor dredging and the extension of the piers at the river mouth by the federal government permitted the movement of large coal barges in and out of the port by the mid 1870s. The Buffalo, Rochester, & Pittsburgh Railroad, designed to give western New York easier access to the Pennsylvania coal supply, was completed in 1883. A spur of that railroad was extended to Charlotte harbor, where Arthur G. Yates, a prominent Rochester businessman, constructed a large trestle for loading coal barges by gravity. The shipment of Pennsylvania coal to Canadian cities then became a major activity of the port, a one-way trade which for many decades overshadowed other lake commerce. In 1905 the B.R.&P. and Grand Trunk Railroads jointly backed a new company known as the Ontario Car Ferry which launched "floating freight yards." These large ferries plied the lake for many decades carrying loaded coal cars to Canada and returning the empties to Charlotte. The coal export business, as important as it was to maintaining activity at the port, was essentially independent of the Rochester economy.¹³

No doubt one reason for the fact that Charlotte never achieved major status as a port lay in the physical limitations of the actual harbor. In its original condition the outlet of the Genesee River, emerging from between the steep walls of its gorge, spread out to form a grassy marsh, shoals, and a

sandbar a half mile offshore. Early navigators threaded their way through and around these obstacles, and sought relief from the federal government. As early as 1829 the U.S. Army Engineers constructed wooden piers through the bay to encourage the river to "scour" its own channel in springtime. This technique increased the navigable depth at Charlotte from eight to twelve feet but necessitated later extensions and improvements of the piers as the Genesee continually redeposited silt in the channel. In 1882 the Engineers launched a major assault on the recalcitrant river, projecting improved piers greater than 3,200 feet in length and occasional dredging to maintain a channel at least fifteen feet deep. In the course of eighteen seasons they spent over half a million dollars to achieve these goals (later amended to provide a sixteen foot channel), but in April, 1901 a steamer leaving Charlotte with coal bound for Ogdensburg ran firmly aground in water three-fourths as deep as it was supposed to be.¹⁴ Apparently as a result of this incident, the Engineers' report for the year acknowledged that "the channel . . . requires more or less redredging annually on account of sediment deposited by the Genesee River in freshets."¹⁵

Despite the efforts of the Army Engineers, some Rochester leaders felt that the federal government habitually shortchanged Charlotte in terms of improvements. Resentment over the alleged injustice from time to time found its way into the public prints. In point of fact, federal improvements at Oswego, for example, had cost \$1,500,000 by 1882 while expenditures at Charlotte totaled a paltry \$353,000. At the turn of the century expenditures-to-date at Oswego had risen to nearly \$2,000,000 while those at Charlotte stood at \$531,000.¹⁶ Whether any amount of harbor improvements would have significantly influenced the volume of traffic at Charlotte is a moot point. In retrospect, the existing improvements seem to have been adequate for the accommodation of potential traffic. However, this view

was not current among Greater Rochester advocates during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and at an early stage schemes for the annexation of Charlotte by the city were tied to plans for obtaining more generous harbor appropriations.

Charlotte's development was in fact so closely connected to Rochester's that in some ways it is difficult to speak of a separate history for the lakeside village. Its principal economic roles as port, summer resort, and iron manufactory were all stimulated by the nearby city. Charlotte did serve as a village center for farmers in the Town of Greece, but even this function was overshadowed by the proximity to Rochester which was a far more adequate trading center.

A look at the separate Charlotte listings in the Rochester House Directory for 1915-16 tells us something about the composition of the village population. Fifty of the 322 individuals listed (as heads of households or independent persons; the whole population numbered 2,000) gave their occupations as "farmer." At least some of these were probably retired farmers who had, following the irregular custom, taken up village residence. Judging from occupations, the rest were a heterogeneous mixture of workers, generally skilled, and of tradesmen, generally small. A random sampling of fifty of these non-farm persons includes fourteen tradesmen (no fewer than five grocers); ten skilled blue collar workers or foremen; seven white collar workers (three clerks, three salesmen, and a bookkeeper); four civil servants (all policemen); five semi-skilled or unskilled workers; two retired persons; and one professional man, a lawyer. Seven of the fifty are difficult to categorize. Four of these gave their occupation as "engineer," and could have been janitors, locomotive operators, or professional men. The other three gave their occupation as "hotel," but whether they were proprietors, desk clerks, or managers is unclear.¹⁷

Of additional interest is the degree of overlap in Charlotte and Rochester listings. Out of another random sample of 144 non-farm persons in the 1915-16 Charlotte listing, fully thirty-one had additional listings in the City Directory. Most of these carried the address of the individual's place of business with the notation "house at Charlotte" or "boards at Charlotte." A smaller number represented individuals who lived in the city but whose place of business was Charlotte. A few apparently had dual residences, or close relatives in one place or the other. In any case the number of dual listings (21% of the non-farm sample) probably underrepresents the close connections, economic and social, which many Charlotte residents felt towards the city. One additional search employing the same sample of 144 and the directories for 1895 reveals that only 20% had been listed as Charlotte residents twenty years previously, while 10% had been city residents. During the same interval Charlotte's population doubled from one to two thousand.¹⁸

Annexation Proposed

Proposals for the annexation of Charlotte were discussed as early as 1875. The year before Rochester had accomplished a great omnibus annexation. A bill sent through the state legislature and signed by the Governor on May 19, 1874 more than doubled the city's existing 5,000 acres by adding suburban sections on all sides. Although the question of annexing Charlotte was considered by an *ad hoc* committee of the Rochester Common Council, the matter was laid aside in the face of objections on the part of some villagers and the Iron Manufacturing Company.¹⁹

The question rested for some twenty years. It was next raised in 1893 when the annexation of Charlotte was placed on an agenda of discussion topics for one of the regular

evening meetings of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce. Another topic which the Chamber discussed on that October evening was the proposed annexation of the Hawaiian Islands by the United States, but this was quickly voted down on anti-imperialistic grounds. The proposal to annex Charlotte received a warmer reception. Several of the city's leading businessmen rose to declare their support for the idea; it was pointed out that Buffalo was receiving millions of dollars in federal harbor improvement money for each hundred thousand that Charlotte was allotted. If Charlotte were annexed, advocates maintained, the harbor's name could be changed to "Port of Rochester"; then local congressmen could argue more intelligibly for bigger appropriations. It was pointed out that Rochester deserved a better harbor because of its favorable location: among the cities on the Great Lakes, Rochester was closest to the anthracite coal fields.

A few members of the Chamber declared themselves in favor of an even more ambitious scheme. If the limits of Rochester could be pushed northward to the lake, could they not with equal ease be moved eastward to take in Irondequoit Bay? At one point during the lively debate a well-prepared Chamber member stated that Rochester's area was not one-fourth that of Buffalo, Syracuse, or Rome. The population of the latter city was less than 15,000. If Rochester would extend its area, said the expansion advocate, its population could number 200,000 rather than the 145,000 recorded in the 1892 state census. The city's true importance, relative to its upstate New York rivals, could be clarified by a boundary adjustment.²⁰

A special Chamber of Commerce committee designated to study the issue met the following month with representatives of the suburban towns and villages. The suburban representatives were not uniformly enthusiastic. One or two private citizens of Charlotte at the meeting favored the proposal, but the village president described his posture as

“cautious.” The deputation from the Town of Irondequoit was unanimously opposed. Some of the eight committee members also took a conservative position. George C. Buell, a wholesale grocer, YMCA leader, and leading light of the Chamber, said that extension of the city should be gradual. He thought that if the Chamber was to take a position at all, it should limit its annexation ambitions to Charlotte and perhaps some east side neighborhoods. Buell also reminded his listeners that annexation decisions were not made in the Chamber of Commerce: “We don’t propose to go to Albany and fight for this thing against the Common Council and the [town] supervisors.”²¹

Nevertheless, the committee returned a report favoring annexation of Charlotte, the Village of Brighton, and a few assorted smaller parcels. (A minority report advocated the far grander scheme of annexing all of Irondequoit.) While there is nothing to indicate that the city administration responded to the committee’s proposals, reaction in Charlotte was intense. An indignation meeting of some two hundred taxpayers at the Charlotte fire hall was held early in February. Nearly unanimously the Charlotte taxpayers felt that annexation would mean heavy taxes to pay for new sewers and pavements, professional firemen, and city schools.²² The next day headlines in the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* announced:

Coy Little Charlotte! Scared Half to Death by Big Rochester’s Proposal. Over Young to Marry. She prefers her village ways to the brilliancy and extravagance of city life and turns her back on her wooer.²³

A week later a committee of Charlotte taxpayers said they had collected 161 signatures on an anti-annexation petition. They pledged that they would “watch the city,” particularly the Chamber of Commerce. Meanwhile, the unincorporated hamlet of Baldwinsville, hardly more than a crossroads on the

south side of Charlotte, sent a petition to the village board seeking annexation by Charlotte as a means of staying out of the city!²⁴

The advocacy of annexation schemes by the Chamber of Commerce in 1894 sparked little interest within the city's political leadership, then being consolidated under boss George W. Aldridge.²⁵ Annexation of Charlotte by the city hardly seemed a distinct possibility in the mid-1890s, and a newspaper correspondent in the country village of Webster facetiously observed, "We are pleased to notice in one of our Rochester papers that an effort is being made to annex Charlotte to that city. We always thought Rochester would never amount to anything without Charlotte."²⁶

Although the Charlotte annexation movement of the mid-1890s quietly fizzled out, the arguments relating to port improvements would be taken up again twenty years later during the final, successful annexation campaign. Once raised, the idea of making Charlotte the port of Rochester in name as well as in fact provided a favorable undercurrent which, when combined with anxieties over vice in the resort, was enough to convince even Charlotte that annexation was desirable.

A Moral Wave

Charlotte's union with the city in 1915 depended in large part on the impulse toward moral reform characteristic of the early years of this century. An early advertising campaign by the owners of the Ontario Beach hotel and amusement park had given Charlotte the nickname "Coney Island of the West."²⁷ When first applied the nickname seemed innocent enough, but eventually it took on dark connotations. By 1900 there were at least thirty-five saloons in Charlotte — more than one for each of the twenty-eight street corners

along the principal thoroughfares. With each succeeding year the problems of weekend drunkenness and vice in the lakeside village grew, even as "clean-up" campaigns in Rochester forced tighter regulations on the city saloons.

As early as 1899 certain amusements at Charlotte aroused criticism. When the resort season opened in April, Village President George P. Goulding announced his intention to ban slot machines, dishonest games, and Sunday baseball. The Rochester *Evening Times* sarcastically headlined the story, "Moral Wave at Charlotte." The same newspaper account carried an announcement by the Rochester Retail Liquor Dealers Association of a crusade against "Raines Law hotels" in Charlotte. Sale of beer and liquor on Sunday in Charlotte, said the city barkeepers, was cutting into their weekday business.²⁸

The issue of the Raines Law hotels illustrates not only one aspect of Charlotte's difficulty, but also some of the larger problems associated with the crusade for temperance at the turn of the century. The Raines Liquor Tax Law, passed in 1896, was New York's first state-wide attempt at regulating the retail liquor traffic. As a concession to temperance lobbyists, the state's lawmakers banned sale of alcoholic beverages on Sundays except in hotels. The section of the law represented another episode in the protracted effort to force the Sunday closing of saloons, in turn part of the larger effort by reformers to "tame" the saloon through regulatory action. But in some localities the plan backfired; saloonkeepers added one or more sleeping rooms to their establishments and continued to open on Sunday, sometimes with the collusion of local law enforcers. Worse, the sleeping quarters hastily added to saloons multiplied the potential sites for illicit sex. In 1904, a committee formed by the Rochester YMCA reported that less than a fourth of the eighty-eight "hotels" in the city were really hotels.²⁹

The YMCA report was part of a series of attempts by local

reformers to excite officials into anti-vice campaigns. In 1897, Clinton Howard, Rochester's leading temperance advocate, organized a Prohibition Union of Christian Men, a group of activists pledged to pressure the city administration into closing saloons on Sunday and dance halls entirely. Not content with occasional symbolic raids against one or two establishments, Howard's men volunteered to place themselves in the field to watch for violations of the law. With the reluctant cooperation of the mayor and police officials, they succeeded in closing the city saloons on Sunday, and in driving most of the Raines Law hotels out. However, the problems of Sunday drinking and worse forms of vice would not stay dead. Seven years later Howard's organization along with the local chapter of the Anti-Saloon League and the Ministerial Association invoked another concerted campaign against the city's saloons, dance halls, houses of ill repute, and motion picture theatres.³⁰

The climax of Rochester's effort at moral reform came following appointment of Chief of Police Joseph M. Quigley by Mayor Hiram Edgerton in 1908. Often called "Holy Joe" Quigley by his critics, the new chief launched his administration with a vigorous drive against vagrants, loiterers, and obscene postcards. In 1912, Quigley called in all known gamblers and operators of disorderly houses and warned them to move on. The few who ignored his warning were promptly arrested; Chief Quigley thereafter tirelessly congratulated himself on his "clean" city, but much of the vice problem had merely been pushed beyond the city limits, particularly into the Village of Charlotte where police presence consisted mainly of a few part-time sheriff's deputies hired in summer.³¹ Now Charlotte's extraordinarily plentiful saloons were joined and frequented by some of Rochester's most vicious elements.

Of course, not all saloons in Rochester or in Charlotte became Raines Law hotels, and not all the "hotels" were

operated as places of assignation and prostitution. But the phenomenon, where it occurred, was a powerful reinforcement for common assumptions about the saloon and alcoholic indulgence. From a modern perspective it is sometimes difficult to sort out the exact nature of the lawlessness and vice which from time to time horrified contemporaries and which lead one of them to charge that Charlotte had become “the sinkhole of Rochester.”³² Often the vice raids conducted by police in Rochester involved nothing more than saloons which curtained their windows, operated with defective licenses, or featured dancing or ladies’ sitting rooms. On the other hand the saloon sometimes was an adjunct to organized gambling and prostitution. Since contemporary accounts assumed a good deal of knowledge on the part of the reader for reasons of delicacy, it is difficult to describe conditions in Charlotte on the eve of annexation with any precision. We are left with more than a few elliptic references to the “disorderly persons” who frequented the saloons of Rochester and Charlotte, and with references to the village’s “appalling moral conditions” and “low element.”

However, an exact quantification of social conditions in Charlotte in 1915 is less important than the way residents at the time perceived those conditions. The statement of one annexation proponent, that “one cannot take a car to the lake shore in summer on a Sunday without colliding with a band of disorderly persons” seemed an adequate summary to many village residents.³³ Persons who thought it was necessary to clean up Charlotte were agreed that a precinct station of the Rochester police was called for; in order to have one, Charlotte must be annexed.

Annexation Accomplished

Although Charlotte’s annexation had been discussed intermittently for decades, the issue took a serious coloring

after 1910. In January of that year Rochester Mayor Hiram Edgerton included a strong annexation statement in his annual message to the Common Council. "It is apparent that the city is expanding in every direction, so that its boundaries will have to be enlarged," declared the mayor. "A greater Rochester is no longer a future possibility but a present fact."³⁴ During the succeeding eight years Edgerton vigorously pursued an expansion program which resulted in the annexation of nearly 9,000 acres—about forty percent of the city's present area. The annexation of Charlotte is thus part of the larger story of municipal expansion early in the century. But there was an important difference between Charlotte's annexation and that of the several large and small unincorporated parcels also taken during those eight years. While residents of the other sections generally opposed joining the city—and were annexed against their will because of the city administration's influence in the state legislature—many residents of Charlotte actively worked for annexation.

Except in Charlotte, Edgerton's call for expansion in January, 1910 brought little response. Only there did a group of taxpayers, calling themselves the "Beach Avenue Improvement Association," emphatically go on record favoring annexation. At the Association meeting held in February, even Village President Frank Pye spoke in favor of the scheme.³⁵ Mayor Edgerton no doubt gave these matters some thought, and chose June 18, the date of the inaugural service of a new passenger steamship, the "Rochester," to announce a grand annexation plan. Newspapers friendly to the city administration were briefed in advance, and Edgerton made his annexation speech on board ship, standing congenially next to Frank Pye. The big news June 18th was not the new steamship, but the "Greater Rochester" to be. Charlotte was the centerpiece of Edgerton's plan, which included annexation of sections on all sides of the city.

Under banner headlines the mayor was quoted as saying annexation of Charlotte was vital, "not only for the development of the harbor and its trade but for the future development of trade at the port for the benefit of the city." "With proper harbor facilities," he said, "the lake passenger boats will continue to make Charlotte a port of entry and tourists from all over the country will come to Rochester."³⁶

During the summer the prospects for a quick acceptance of the mayor's program seemed rosy. Many suburban residents who might normally have signed petitions or gathered at "indignation meetings" were caught up in the mayor's appeal to the Greater Rochester idea. As for the residents of Charlotte, one newspaper asserted that the prevailing attitude was, "Charlotte needs Rochester, and Rochester, Charlotte." Therefore, "Do it for Charlotte as well as Rochester."³⁷

However, the major extension of city boundaries contemplated in 1910 did not take place. In November the state Democratic party captured the governorship and both houses of the legislature as well. Since municipal boundary changes required state law, the Republican leaders of Rochester were forced to temporarily shelve annexation plans. As the Rochester *Herald* explained, "the [legislative] delegation from Monroe is the only solid Republican delegation in the state . . . In a Republican Legislature this solidity might be of considerable advantage in gaining political favors. In a Democratic Senate and Assembly, the support of the Monroe delegation will be a handicap."³⁸ The situation was neatly summarized in a political cartoon (by the talented local artist, "Clubb") which appeared earlier in the year. An orphan girl labeled "Charlotte" is seated on a doorstep asking, "Am I going to get in now?" "Father Rochester," appearing as portly as Hiram Edgerton, stands in the doorway looking down in utter perplexity.³⁹ For the next two years, the Democratic majority in the legislature refused to act on local measures sent from Rochester.

Advocates of annexation in Charlotte were next heard from in November, 1912, when a newly formed village organization called the Law and Order League invited residents to a meeting for the purpose of discussing the issue. Those who attended the meeting had much to say about disorderly elements who infested the village. A committee was appointed to call on Mayor Edgerton and request annexation; but the results of that conference, held a few days later, are unknown since neither party cared to discuss the outcome.⁴⁰ Perhaps Edgerton urged delay to await the organization of a new state legislature in a few months' time.

As events proved, the 1913 legislature was more sympathetic to local bills from Rochester, but the momentum Edgerton had skillfully generated in 1910 was lost. Once again attorneys in city hall drew up an annexation proposal which included substantial sections in the towns of Irondequoit, Brighton, Gates, and Greece, as well as the Village of Charlotte. This time there was little spirit of acquiescence in the suburbs. Supervisors and justices of the peace in the adjacent towns hurriedly organized protest meetings and threatened to send lobbyists to Albany. In each town local officials assumed personal leadership of the anti-annexation campaign.⁴¹ In Greece, Supervisor Frank Dobson called a series of meetings to organize opposition; however, a large meeting he conducted at the Charlotte fire hall—packed by oppositionists from areas outside the village—revealed substantial support for annexation in Charlotte itself. John C. Henderson, a Charlotte man and perennial annexationist, apparently spoke for a number of others in the village when he declared he'd "rather be a lamp post in the city than an arc light in the village." But former Village President Frank Pye, who had altered his position on annexation and was now working in league with Supervisor Dobson, forcefully led the oppositionist faction at the meeting. In the end the meeting, attended by about 150

persons, narrowly defeated a proposition to support annexation.⁴²

Retreating in the face of suburban opposition, the city administration pared down its 1913 annexation plan to a few parcels on the east side, notably the "Holland Settlement" neighborhood east of Culver Road and north of old Brighton Village. "Half a loaf is better than no bread," said Mayor Edgerton.⁴³ Ironically, on the same day the mayor announced the reduction of the city's annexation bill, a village election in Charlotte said to focus on the annexation issue swept the miniature Frank Pye "machine" from power. The new Village President, Charles Hannahs, enjoyed the support of the Law and Order League and other good government elements in defeating Pye's candidate for the job. Two weeks later, the League held a taxpayers meeting which resulted in a vote of 115 to 4 in favor of annexation.⁴⁴ Despite these developments, the city administration made no move to reincorporate Charlotte in its 1913 annexation program. The neighborhoods it had settled on were annexed by a law which became effective January 1, 1914.

By 1915, when the political climate at the state capital strongly favored chances for the successful passage of local bills sent from Rochester, Mayor Edgerton seemed to have lost a little of his earlier enthusiasm for expansion campaigns. But he doggedly announced another bill for the annexation of Charlotte in January of that year. In the plan he outlined for the press, the mayor stated his intention to take in Lincoln Park on the city's southwest, the Kodak Park district, and Summerville, as well as the port village. Edgerton said that factory owners in Gates and Greece had been getting away without paying city taxes long enough, and that businessmen in Charlotte had "rallied" to the annexation idea—except for the liquor dealers whose annual tax would rise to \$750.⁴⁵

In succeeding weeks the city's latest annexation plan

generated a surprising number of letters-to-the-editor, most of which were favorable. The President of the Chamber of Commerce, George W. Thayer, supported the annexation of Charlotte in the interest of "more wholesome social conditions" and reiterated the chamber's standing position on harbor improvements.⁴⁶ George A. Gillette, a city lawyer and realty man, directed a letter to Mayor Edgerton (reprinted in the *Democrat and Chronicle*) supportive of annexation as a generalized principle; in Gillette's view, annexation was a means of protecting the city taxpayers' indirect investment in suburban growth.⁴⁷ John C. Henderson, the Charlotte property owner, said that his major concern was with the lack of vice controls in the village: "What use is it for the city to be strict in the enforcement of law if the opposite condition exist with all the attractions beyond the city line?" Henderson also agreed with the argument for improved harbor facilities and wanted city control of Charlotte's beach parks, then owned by the New York Central and the Bartholomay brewery. So persuaded was he by these arguments, Henderson suggested that the city go ahead and annex the village and the connecting boulevard, leaving the "others" out.⁴⁸

Reaction from the "others" was generally mixed, except perhaps in Irondequoit where two hundred residents at a meeting in the Grange hall unanimously resolved to fight annexation of any part of the town. The Irondequoiters claimed to be mostly farmers, except for some who had "moved away from the city in order to get away from it."⁴⁹ In Charlotte, the faction supporting annexation was gathering names on a petition. A spokesman for the petitioners said that "Charlotte was more or less a dumping ground for Rochester . . . and it is only a matter of time, anyhow, before the expansion of Rochester compels the bringing of the beach resort within the city boundary." The Reverend Henry S. Gilt, an organizer of the Law and Order League, added

that there was "little sense in Rochester cleaning itself up only to have its good work undone in Charlotte."⁵⁰

Despite such expressions of support, the city administration delayed an announcement of what shape its annexation bill might take. The mayor seemed to postpone a final decision; during the last week in February he was busy signing 1,900 municipal bonds with a broken wrist. In a statement to the press Edgerton said he had noticed "no great enthusiasm for annexation."⁵¹ Some Charlotte annexationists wanted to know why they had been "dropped" so coldly.⁵² Abruptly—less than three weeks after Edgerton's noncommittal statement—news was received from Albany that State Senator George F. Argetsinger had introduced a bill for the annexation of Charlotte, along with connecting strips of land. Argetsinger, a leader of the Rochester delegation at the capital and chairman of the Senate Cities Committee, introduced the bill two days before Charlotte's annual village election; whether this was deliberate or merely coincidental, the effect was to prevent use of the election as a direct test of sentiment on the issue.⁵³

The "hotly contested" village election which was held on March 17 returned a number of incumbents to office. Charles L. Hannahs was given another term as Village President and Larry Sexton was returned as Police Justice. The two men were the dominant force on the village board. Sexton held a second job as Justice of the Peace in the Town of Greece as well. As the *Evening Times* pointed out, Sexton had much to lose from annexation, and not suprisingly he was eager to lead whatever opposition to the bill he could organize.⁵⁴ On the day of the election he was quoted as saying that the bill "had been conceived in the star chamber proceedings of the Chamber of Commerce of Rochester."⁵⁵ Charles Hannahs, who had originally won office with the support of the pro-annexation Law and Order League, was no less concerned

over the threat to his position. The two men found an important ally in Charlotte resident Frank Dobson, who simultaneously held jobs as Greece Town Supervisor and Assemblyman in the state legislature.

As March drew to a close, the Charlotte politicians staged a last ditch effort to ward off annexation, despite a bland admission from Mayor Edgerton that the annexation bill was indeed “purely an administration measure”—that is, a measure which had the blessing of the local Republican machine.⁵⁶ Dobson, Hannahs, and Sexton, who were themselves Republican, nevertheless took their case to the people in two meetings. At one of the evening sessions Hannahs told the villagers he would lead the meeting impartially, but it was generally agreed he fell short of the goal. “The annexation bill,” declared Hannahs in public forum, “is the most damnable bill I’ve ever heard of.”⁵⁷

The fulminations of the three jobholders had no decisive effect. Annexationists, who appeared to speak for a clear majority at the village meetings, charged the local politicians with using “specious arguments.” One such argument was the fear, expressed by Hannahs, that annexation of the Charlotte school would mean abandonment of students who lived outside the village but inside the local school district. That apprehension was publicly countered by the principal of the Charlotte school, who felt that the Rochester school authorities could be trusted to do the right thing.⁵⁸ John C. Henderson rose after the school principal to declare that “education without moral force is no good. We must think about the moral prosperity of our youth.” In addition to “moral prosperity,” Henderson anticipated a good deal of material prosperity as the result of annexation. “This town will increase as the port of Rochester. It will grow in five years beyond our fondest expectations. People of the city would come down to live. Real estate values would double...”⁵⁹

Although Hannahs and his colleagues failed to secure

hoped-for support from their constituents at the meetings, they deputized themselves as a delegation to call on Mayor Edgerton. Edgerton listened to the Charlotte men politely, but later told reporters that “they could not make a monkey out of him.”⁶⁰ During debate over the annexation bill in Albany, Assemblyman-Supervisor Dobson made an impassioned speech to fellow legislators which led the correspondent for the Rochester *Post-Express* to remark, “Thus he stood on the bridge of annexation which Father Rochester sought to cross to take Miss Charlotte for his bride when her guardians, the Legislature of her state and her Governor, would not interpose to save her from such a union.”⁶¹ Dobson’s vote was in fact the only one recorded against the bill in the Assembly (a similar margin of thirty-seven to one prevailed in the State Senate).⁶²

Fully two hundred supporters turned out in mid-April to attend Mayor Edgerton’s formal hearing on the annexation bill. The only dissident voice heard at the city hall meeting was that of an attorney for the Rochester Railway Company, who registered a formal protest over the proposed reduction in trolley fare to Charlotte from ten, to five, cents (car fare within the City of Rochester was fixed at five cents by a service-at-cost contract). Chamber of Commerce President Thayer promised greater things for the harbor, pointing out to his listeners that scheduled improvements of the Welland Canal and Port of Toronto posed challenges that ought to be met.⁶³ James E. Kelso, a prominent Charlotte resident (and owner of a commercial laundry in the city), had already indicated that he and a few friends were discussing a YMCA branch for the former village; a new “interdenominational tabernacle” was not beyond the realm of possibility.⁶⁴

The bill, signed by Mayor Edgerton and Governor Charles Whitman in April, 1915, became fully effective at midnight, December 31st. Among the legal details involved in converting the Village of Charlotte into the city’s

Twenty-third Ward was the necessity of appointing a temporary alderman. The Rochester Common Council appointed Charles Hannahs, who was afterwards returned to office by the voters for several terms.

On New Year's Eve a few Charlotte folk took special notice that one of the area's oldest villages was passing from existence. The Fire Department and Woman's Auxiliary held a ball attended by Mayor Edgerton and other city officials. At the Methodist Church, descendants of the first settlers made short speeches. Police Chief Joseph Quigley, who happened to stop by the gathering, was called upon to say a few words. He promised that "the law would be strictly enforced at the lakeside," and that "the cancerous spots would do well to erase themselves immediately."⁶⁵

As 1916 arrived, most Rochesterians were pleased with the idea that the city had become, in the words of the *Herald*, "an actual port of the unsalted seas."⁶⁶ Also pleasing, to both city residents and the erstwhile citizens of Charlotte, was the contemplated reduction in car fare—to become effective once the corporation counsel had bested the railway company's attorneys in court. But the change which seemed most significant was symbolized by the arrival in Charlotte, at midnight, of three Hibernians from the city police force. "Twelve bells saw Officers Doane, Christie, and Moore stationed on Broadway," said the *Democrat and Chronicle*, "commissioned to keep the law in Charlotte as it is kept in Rochester."⁶⁷

NOTES

1. Blake McKelvey, **Rochester, The Water-Power City 1812-1854** (Cambridge, Mass., 1945), pp. 31-32.
2. Emma M. Pollard Greer, "Home Builders of Old Charlotte." **Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series**, Vol. XI (1932), pp. 245-260.
3. Edward R. Foreman, "Annals of Rochester," **RHS Publication Fund Series**, Vol. X (1931), p. 277.
4. McKelvey, "The Port of Rochester; A History of Its Lake Trade," **Rochester History**, Vol. XVI (October, 1954), No. 4, pp. 3-4. Horatio Gates Spafford, **A Gazetteer of the State of New York** (Albany, 1824), p. 205, reported twenty-two buildings in Charlotte in 1822; he estimated that exports of flour that year would total 100,000 barrels, in addition to quantities of potash, beef and pork, whiskey, staves, and smaller amounts of butter, lard, corn, cider, lumber, cheese, hams, oil, and fruit.
5. McKelvey, "The Port of Rochester," pp. 7-9, and **Water-Power City**, pp. 169-170.
6. Greer, **History of Charlotte** (typescript in Rochester Public Library, n.d. 1930?), p. 255.
7. McKelvey, "The Port of Rochester," p. 12.
8. Greer, **History of Charlotte**, unpaginated Chapter 38.
9. **Rochester Union and Advertiser**, July 6, 1885.
10. **Union and Advertiser**, June 1, 1889; McKelvey, "The Port of Rochester," p. 14.
11. Greer, **History of Charlotte**, pp. 100-109.
12. **Ibid.**; McKelvey, "The Port of Rochester," p. 13.
13. McKelvey, "The Port of Rochester," pp. 12-13, 15; George W. Hilton, **The Great Lakes Car Ferries** (Berkeley, Calif., 1962), pp. 237-244.
14. Office of the Chief of Engineers, **Annual Report upon the Improvement of Harbors on Lake Ontario and of St. Lawrence River and Harbors Thereon, New York** (Washington, D.C., 1901), pp. 593, 3355-3356.
15. **Ibid.**
16. **Ibid.**, pp. 3365-3370.
17. Drew Allis Company, **The Rochester House Directory**, No. XIII (1915-1916), pp. 955-958.
18. The village population was 830 in 1890 and 1,938 in 1910, according to the federal census.

19. **Union and Advertiser**, May 19, 1874; Greer, **History of Charlotte**, pp. 270-271. Discussion of the politics of annexation in Rochester is contained in Joseph W. Barnes, "The Annexation of Brighton Village," **Rochester History**, Vol. XXXV (January, 1973), No. 1, pp. 7-10, 23. See also the author's "Rochester's Era of Annexations 1901-1926" (MS Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1974).
20. **Union and Advertiser**, October 10, 1893.
21. **Union and Advertiser**, December 20, 1893.
22. **Union and Advertiser**, February 3, 1894.
23. Quoted in Greer, **History of Charlotte**, p. 273.
24. **Union and Advertiser**, February 10, 1894.
25. McKelvey, "The Mayors of Rochester's Mid Years: 1860-1900," **Rochester History**, Vol. XXVIII (January, 1966), No. 1, p. 21.
26. Greer, **History of Charlotte**, p. 276.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
28. **Rochester Evening Times**, April 13, 1899.
29. David M. Ellis et al., **A History of New York State** (Ithaca, N.Y., rev. ed. 1967), p. 378; McKelvey, **Rochester, The Quest for Quality 1890-1925** (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 121-122; McKelvey, "Walter Rauschenbush's Rochester," **Rochester History**, Vol. XIV (October, 1952), No. 4, p. 13.
30. McKelvey, **Quest for Quality**, pp. 122, 137.
31. McKelvey, "A History of the Police of Rochester, New York," **Rochester History**, Vol. XXV (October, 1963), No. 4, pp. 13-16.
32. John C. Henderson quoted in **Rochester Democrat and Chronicle**, March 24, 1915.
33. **Union and Advertiser**, February 15, 1918; **Democrat and Chronicle** February 16, 1916.
34. Mayor Hiram Edgerton, "Annual Message to the Common Council," January 10, 1910, contained in **Proceedings of the Common Council**.
35. **Rochester Herald**, February 26, 1910.
36. **Evening Times**, June 18, **Democrat and Chronicle**, June 19, 1910.

37. **Evening Times**, June 20, 1910. "Do It For Rochester" was another of the popular slogans, like "Rochester Made Means Quality," then being promoted by local boosters. McKelvey, "Rochester's Hesitant Promotion of the Image of Quality," **Rochester History**, Vol. XXXIV (October, 1972), No. 4, p. 5.
38. **Herald**, November 25, 1910.
39. **Herald**, January 26, 1910.
40. **Democrat and Chronicle**, November 22; **Union and Advertiser, Evening Times**, November 26, 1912.
41. **Evening Times**, March 10; **Democrat and Chronicle**, March 11; **Herald**, March 12, 1913.
42. **Democrat and Chronicle, Herald**, March 13, 1913.
43. **Union and Advertiser, Evening Times**, March 18; **Herald**, March 19, 1913.
44. **Herald**, March 17 and April 2; **Democrat and Chronicle**, March 18 & April 2; **Union and Advertiser**, March 19 & April 2, 1913.
45. **Democrat and Chronicle**, January 18, 1915. The city's excise tax on saloons was \$600 higher than Charlotte's. Undoubtedly the tax savings was an added reason for saloons to locate in the village, in addition to lax enforcement of regulations.
46. **Democrat and Chronicle**, January 22, 1915.
47. **Democrat and Chronicle**, January 24, 1915.
48. **Democrat and Chronicle**, January 25, 1915. Other letters on the subject appeared in the **Democrat and Chronicle** on January 20, 27, and February 10, and in the **Union and Advertiser** on January 21.
49. **Democrat and Chronicle, Herald**, January 28, 1915.
50. **Union and Advertiser**, February 15; **Democrat and Chronicle, Herald**, February 16, 1915.
51. **Democrat and Chronicle**, February 22, 27, 1915.
52. **Post-Express**, March 1, 6, 1915.
53. **Democrat and Chronicle**, March 16, 1915.
54. **Evening Times**, March 17, 1915.
55. **Herald**, March 17, 1915.

56. **Post-Express**, March 16, **Democrat and Chronicle**, March 17, 1915.
57. **Democrat and Chronicle**, March 25, 1915.
58. **Post-Express**, March 20; **Herald, Union and Advertiser**, March 25, 1915.
 The annexation bill followed the usual precedent of abolishing the affected school district, in this case, Greece School District 4. The Charlotte school house became a unit of the City School District, and the City assumed the outstanding debts and uncollected taxes of District 4. As a concession at first formalized by an ordinance, city officials agreed to permit the few dozen students residing outside the former village but inside the old district boundaries to continue attending the Charlotte school without paying tuition. The guarantee was made stronger in 1918, when a provision was written into the annexation law that abolished the much smaller Greece District 10 (Chapter 547, **Laws of 1918**). By writing the promise into the annexation law itself, it could henceforth be altered only by new state law. No great importance was attached to these proceedings at the time, since they involved only a small number of students living in areas which would inevitably (it was expected) be annexed by the growing city.
59. **Democrat and Chronicle**, March 25, 1915.
60. **Post-Express**, March 22, **Herald**, March 25, 1915.
61. Quoted in Greer, **History of Charlotte**, unpaginated Chapter 41.
62. **Democrat and Chronicle**, March 26, April 6, 1915.
63. **Democrat and Chronicle**, April 16, 1915.
64. **Herald**, March 27, 1915.
65. **Democrat and Chronicle**, January 1, 1916.
66. **Herald**, March 20, 1915.
67. **Democrat and Chronicle**, January 1, 1916.



Charlotte Scenes