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The Annexation of Brighton Village

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Among the things that demonstrated Rochester's extraordinary vitality in the early decades of the twentieth century were the city's numerous additions to its territory. In seven of the years between 1905 and 1926 the city annexed land from the adjoining towns, maintaining a constant expansionist pressure on its neighbors. As a result, the city nearly doubled its area, from 11,456 acres at the turn of the century to 22,246 acres in 1926.¹ Rochester's annexation of Brighton Village in 1905 was the introduction to the city's twentieth century "era of annexations," as well as the city's first significant annexation victory during the period. Like later successful annexations, it was not a victory quickly or easily won. During the controversy, in late 1904 and early 1905, the various parties on the question engaged in lively debate. Many of the issues which were relevant to the larger history of Rochester's expansion in the twentieth century surfaced during the Brighton Village episode. The account that follows should, therefore, serve the reader as a summarization of that larger story as well as a history of the demise of Brighton Village.

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In the years 1900-1910, Rochester exhibited phenomenal growth in population and industrial activity. The city's population increased by over a third during the decade, from 163,000 to 218,000.² The need for additional housing and new industrial plants was rapidly consuming available space inside the city borders and stimulating the development of outlying districts. The prosperity of the Kodak Co. caused George Eastman to speed construction of his new manufacturing complex outside the city's borders at Kodak Park. A variety of other industrial concerns settled in Lincoln Park in the town of Gates, just west of the city line. Meanwhile, the construction of the Gleason Works plant on University Avenue used up the last large industrial site available on the city's east side.

Since 1874, when the city more than doubled its size in a single omnibus annexation, not much territory had been added. Urban growth was outpacing the speed with which city administrations extended the corporate borders, despite small additions made in several years between 1891 and 1901. The new factories, while serving as magnets to draw people to the city, competed for space with residential subdivisions. As the supply of land for housing inside the city dwindled, real estate promoters turned to areas outside the city. Both Kodak and Lincoln Parks began attracting housing developments as soon as the new factories were completed. On the east side, wealthy residents had been constructing houses along East Avenue for a number of years. Following their example, developers had provided housing for the middle class to the north and south of the Avenue. By the turn of the century, one of the major thrusts of new residential construction was to the southeast, and it had already leaped over the southeastern city border.³

On the other side of the Culver Road border was Brighton Village, a small hamlet in the northeastern part of the Town of Brighton, which had secured incorporation in 1885.⁴ At the time

of annexation, it exhibited a mixture of urban and rural characteristics. Commuters or shoppers from the village could travel on the city's streetcar system via the Park Avenue line which terminated at the village center (the intersection of East Avenue with North and South Avenues, later renamed Winton Road North and Winton Road South). The New York Central Railroad, bisecting the village from east to west, served the village with separate passenger and freight stations. Within the village's business district were numerous stores, four small hotels, a post office, fire house, and school. Scattered outside the center, the village's industries consisted of a carriage factory, an agricultural chemical plant, and a cold storage warehouse. Many residences were clustered near the village center. Outside the center were a number of fair-sized farms, but these were interspersed with three unevenly developed residential subdivisions: "Barnum Terrace," "Brighton Heights," and the less imaginatively named "M.D. Phillips Subdivision." Although the 1902 platbook shows the subdivisions with the streets in and the building lots numbered, perhaps only a fourth of the lots as yet contained houses. The western end of the village adjoining the city was composed of large parcels held by individuals, some of whom had constructed estate-sized residences on part of their land. Like hundreds of incorporated villages in New York then and now, Brighton was square-shaped and quite compact, measuring about 750 acres.⁵

Although its population numbered only 888 in 1900 (up from 705 in 1890), the village was clearly due for some dramatic increases in population associated with urbanization. By 1905 the erstwhile village (now the city's 21st ward) contained 1,147 persons, and in 1910 its population was 1,582.⁶ These increases were the product of population pressures in the city and of new in-migration to the Rochester area: a sampling of 86 persons listed as living in various neighborhoods of the 21st Ward in

1905-1906 contained 19 names that were listed in the 1895 or 1900 editions of the City Directory.

The juxtaposition of farms and subdivisions is perhaps the clearest image of the village's *de facto* transition from a rural hamlet to a province of the advancing city. Inevitably, the growing number of village residents required additional services of the type enjoyed by neighboring city residents. The provision of these urban services became the key factor influencing the timing and extent of the annexation movement. In 1904 the mixed quality of public services available to the village reflected its semi-urban status.

Owing largely to its location, the village had extensive access to public transportation. It was connected with the Rochester Railway Company's streetcar system, and enjoyed both passenger and freight service on the New York Central Railroad. In addition, in 1904 the village would soon be served by the Rochester, Syracuse, & Eastern (interurban electric) Railway. The R. S. & E. Railway Company had already secured a right-of-way through the village south of the New York Central tracks.

While good public transportation was a convenience, other urban services were necessary for the health and safety of the village residents. Adequate fire and police protection, a safe community water supply, and sanitary sewers could be included in this category. In 1904, the village met the first three needs with methods carried over from its days as a rural hamlet. Villagers had felt for some time that their volunteer fire company, small constabulary, and private wells were sufficient. However, the growing urban character of the village by 1904 made these methods unsatisfactory. Fire and police protection promised to become a larger burden on village taxpayers. The water provided by the Brighton wells, needed especially to fight fires, was limited in quantity. For this reason village officials granted a franchise to the newly formed Lake Ontario Water Company,

which had laid pipes in the main streets of the village but had not yet begun supplying water at the time of annexation.

The most pressing public need at the time was for the installation of sewers. The Brighton cesspools grew more obnoxious in direct proportion to the increase in population, and threatened the quality of wellwater. Living in an era when the threat of epidemics in an urban community was not remote, village residents (unlike some modern suburbanites) considered sewers a necessity rather than a convenience. By 1904 many villagers, including town health officer Dr. William Brown, felt that a sewer project should no longer be postponed.

Would Brighton Village build an independent sewer system, or, through annexation to the city, seek connection with the existing Rochester system? The decisive factors affecting this question were costs and geography. The construction of a sewer system serving the village, whether made with Brighton pipes or Rochester pipes, represented a large capital expenditure of public funds. One (probably low) estimate, provided by proponents of an independent system, set the cost at \$50,000—an amount more than eight times the village's normal annual budget, or, an amount which would cost taxpayers about \$385 apiece if raised through special assessment.⁷ This level of expenditure could more easily be absorbed by the larger fiscal resources of the city. Annexation would mean that villagers would immediately begin paying higher city tax rates; on the other hand there was some question whether or not village rates would begin catching up with the city's once Brighton began assuming responsibility for sewers and other needed services. At first glance topographical location would seem to dictate the logic of extending city sewers, but, in fact, simple proximity was deceptive. To the degree that Brighton sewerage could be drained directly into the city's eastside trunk sewer, the cost of an independent sewer treatment plant could be obviated. However, only the western

end of the village drained naturally towards the city sewers. The eastern end of the village, containing the majority of the population, drained naturally to the east and north. Advocates of an independent system reasonably questioned how long they would wait before the city overcame this topographical and engineering difficulty, if annexation occurred.

While the sewer question affected the debate over annexation in the village as a whole, it was particularly important to the property owners of the west end. By and large, these were men of substance with large landholdings held for speculative purposes or for construction of their own estate-sized residences. If they could persuade the city to extend its sewers the short distance into their section they could quickly enjoy sewer service for a small assessment charge. These property owners, many of whom were not village residents, could see little purpose in the idea, or the cost, of an autonomous system when their needs could so easily be met by the city.

The chain of events which led to the annexation of Brighton Village was initiated by this relatively small group of men owning land between Blossom Road and East Avenue in the west end of the village. Late in November, 1904, a half-dozen such men presented a petition to the Rochester Common Council's Committee on Streets and Sewers. The petitioners identified themselves at the beginning of the document as "We, the undersigned property owners of the city of Rochester . . . also owning property adjacent thereto in the village of Brighton. . . ." They implored the Committee to authorize construction of a sewer line laid through Blossom Road and connected to the city's east-side trunk sewer. They wanted the work performed by Rochester's Department of Public Works. In return, they promised payment of their share of the costs through assessment and further pledged that they would not oppose any city plan to annex the area in the future.⁸

The petition was not very extraordinary. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city's normal procedure for determining the timing of needed improvements (e.g. sewers, grading, pavements, sidewalks, or repairs) was to await requests from affected property owners. The Common Council, after favorably judging the necessity for a given improvement and the degree of consensus among the property owners, would then pass an ordinance authorizing the work and directing the city assessors to make a special assessment on the property of those who would benefit from the improvement.

What did make the Blossom Road petition somewhat different in the eyes of the Streets and Sewers Committee was the fact that it requested improvements outside the city border. The aldermen probably knew that if they granted the petitioners' request, their action would raise important questions about the city's policy toward adjoining suburbs. Traditionally, the city had refused extension of services into adjacent territory, and had sound reasons for maintaining this policy. In the first place, the provision of city services to non-residents raised problems in the areas of fair payment and the mechanics of taxation. Moreover, the extension of services to outsiders could interfere with Rochester's ability to compel annexation of territory.

"Compel" might be too strong a term, since the city did not have absolute power to annex territory in 1905 or at any other time. Although city administrations would initiate annexation plans, or at times disavow intention of forcing annexation on unwilling suburbanites, neither they, nor the officials of suburban municipalities, nor even suburban residents voting in referendum possessed the *de jure* power to determine whether annexation would in fact take place. Before the addition of a "popular sovereignty" amendment to the State Constitution in 1927, the determination of municipal boundaries was entirely in the hands of the state Legislature. Municipalities were the legal creation

of the Legislature, which, with the approval of the governor, could amend their charters, enlarge or decrease their territory, or declare them nonexistent at will. These sweeping powers of the Legislature remained essentially intact despite attempts at "home rule" reform made during the convention that wrote the Fourth Constitution in 1894. Article 12; Section 2 of that document provided mechanisms for the Legislature to consult with affected city governments in passing bills for "special city laws"—". . . those [laws] which relate to a single city, or to less than all cities of a class." However, the Legislature retained the right, with the governor's approval, to create special city laws despite a city's objections simply by passing bills for such laws twice.⁹

The annexation of territory to a city required the passage of a special city law. Although the power to annex territory thus appeared entirely in the hands of the state government, in practice the initiative was left to the concerned city government. Rochester's annexation bills were written in the office of the city's Corporation Counsel, who then transmitted them via local members of the Assembly and Senate to the Legislature's joint Cities Committee. It was necessary for the city administration to enlist the cooperation of the local legislators, who would sponsor passage of annexation bills before the Cities Committee and on the floor of the legislative chambers. Members of the Legislature from other parts of the state tended to vote automatically for annexation bills which carried the endorsements of the Cities Committee and the local delegation. If suburbanites or others opposed to a given change in municipal boundaries wished to lobby against an annexation bill, they sent spokesmen to attend meetings of the Cities Committee or approached their state legislator (whose district could, of course, enclose a major portion of the city as well as suburban and rural territory).

From time to time some local legislators acted to block or modify city annexation efforts because of pressure from subur-

ban residents, but normally they cooperated with the city administration. One reason was that the constituencies of the Monroe County delegation contained a far greater number of city residents than townspeople. A far more important reason for the legislators' cooperation was the respect they held for Rochester's powerful Republican boss, George W. Aldridge.

For 39 years, 1883-1922, the taciturn George Aldridge was a major force in Rochester politics, and during the latter half of this period he was an important power broker in state Republican circles as well. Aldridge spent much of his time at Albany, leaving the day-to-day matters of governing Rochester in the hands of men like Mayor James G. Cutler and Cutler's hand-picked successor Hiram H. Edgerton. Although Aldridge rarely intervened directly in the mundane civic affairs of Rochester, his power in Albany helped to assure that bills written by the political managers of Rochester would be favorably received by the normally Republican legislative leadership. The Rochester press of the time used a characteristic phrase to describe proposals for special city laws that had the Aldridge stamp of approval. The newspapers referred to such proposals as "administration measures," and considered the label adequate explanation for belief that a proposal would easily pass the Legislature.¹⁰

In short, the City of Rochester generally possessed actual power to initiate and to force annexation regardless of the wishes of affected residents. Nevertheless, the city administration was usually not heavyhanded in its policy toward suburbs it wished to take in. A frequent theme heard throughout the era of annexations was the expressed reluctance of city officials to annex people against their will. Part of this was the wish to appear democratic, to placate opposition, and to maintain the cooperation of the local legislators. Another reason city leaders wanted to refrain from dragging unwilling suburbanites into their sphere probably reflected the normal scruples of politicians against add-

ing antagonistic elements to their electorate. Still another, and a very important factor weakening the city's aggressiveness was a universal belief in the inevitability of city growth. This belief permeated discussion of annexation until well after the city had stopped adding significant territory to its borders. The "sooner-or-later" attitude permitted city leaders to back away from suburban opposition in the belief that a more favorable atmosphere in the future would make annexation of a given suburban area easier. Whatever the reasons were, the city's usual reluctance to assume an imperialistic role towards its neighbors contributed to a suburban faith that the city *could not* force annexation, and that petitions, referendums, and lobbyists could be effective weapons against annexation.

Returning to the episode of the Blossom Road petition, the problem facing the Streets and Sewers Committeemen was whether the extension of city sewers into Brighton Village would compromise the city's ability to persuade the villagers to join the city at some future time. The enjoyment of urban services was the only telling inducement for suburbanites to acquiesce to annexation; they were never swayed by the prospect of full-fledged citizenship in the city they called their own, and were only negatively influenced by the prospect of city taxes. These facts were not lost on Rochester's political leaders at the turn of the century.

A few days after the Streets and Sewers Committee received the Blossom Road petition, the Rochester *Herald* reported:

{(O)fficials} have practically determined to grant no permits for connections with the east side trunk sewer to residents outside the city. They see that all these outside property owners require to give them the full benefit of city advantages without paying city taxes is a sewer connection.

They can get water from the pipes of the private water company. They can make a private contract with the Rochester Gas and Electric Company to extend its service out East Avenue beyond the city line. If desired, they could construct their own pavements. As a

matter of fact, this territory has now the benefit of fire protection, inasmuch as the city department has never refused to respond to put out a fire in a dwelling adjacent to the city line. If sewer connections are given, these property owners, who will erect some of the finest residences on East Avenue, will pay very little for the privileges of city conveniences, compared with the taxpayers residing in the city.

The newspaper's allusion to free city fire service enjoyed by nearby suburbanites is a concrete illustration of the unfair situation which resulted when developing suburban areas remained outside the city. The residents of these areas, who were in fact residents of metropolitan Rochester, remained in a parasitical relationship to the city that made "suburban life" a possibility. Even when, in the future, highly developed suburbs provided themselves with the entire range of municipal services that were the subjects of debate during the era of annexations, they would leave the city taxpayers the task of paying the extra costs of high urban concentration.

In 1904, however, the issues of "privileged suburbs" lay in the future. As long as the expectation remained intact that developing suburban areas would eventually be annexed, there was little need to be alarmed over temporary injustices in the city-suburban relationship. Instead, participants in a debate over the annexation of a specific area such as Brighton Village limited themselves to questioning pragmatic details. Was the time right for city expansion? How much territory was the city justified in taking? The opponents of Brighton's annexation did not anticipate permanent independence, nor did they explore the long-range implications of providing sewers and other services autonomously.

The petition from the Blossom Road lot owners had little chance of success, but it did raise the question whether the city was ready to move its boundary eastward. Following a nameless alderman's suggestion on November 22, that "the boundaries should be extended immediately" there was a three week period

of uncertainty and speculation. The first report that the city was contemplating an annexation was published in the daily press on December 2.¹² On that day Brighton health officer Dr. William Brown called on the Mayor of Rochester, James G. Cutler, to ask about annexation rumors. Cutler “stated frankly the question of annexing a portion of Brighton was under consideration, but that the matter had not been taken up for final determination.” Brown replied that he was worried if “any considerable portion” of the village were taken by the city, the village would not have enough taxable property left to support its government. The Mayor blandly assured Brown not to worry about this possibility, but would commit himself to no details. In a conversation with a newspaper reporter, Cutler said there was no plan to force annexation against the wishes of village authorities. Later, city officials would disavow any intention to force annexation on affected residents.¹³

In the days that followed, there was speculation that the city would announce intention to annex the west end of the village. The annexation of the west end was seen as a first step toward the village’s inevitable elimination. As the *Herald* reported on December 8, “Ultimately it is admitted, the fate of Brighton Village is to be swallowed up in the municipality of Rochester.” Although village officials probably subscribed to this nearly universal belief, they seemed determined to delay elimination of their jobs as long as possible. Nor would they supinely watch the city take the highly assessed west end of the village, the loss of which would necessitate raising tax rates for the remainder.

So it was that the lines of debate within the village on the annexation question were drawn even before the city’s exact intentions were known. The debate was joined by a growing party of annexationists, led by the west enders, and a similarly growing party of oppositionists led by the village officials. Village Clerk Morrill J. Caley seized the initiative for the op-

positionists with the issuance of a circular on December 9.

Caley's arguments against annexation were detailed and explicit. His circular was practically a catalogue of urban services with accompanying reasons for maintaining village independence. The village had an "ample" street lighting system; it would be "but a short time" before gas and electricity was provided. The water supplied by the Ontario Company was as "good and wholesome" as Hemlock [city] water. Caley was proud (and no doubt politically wise) to state that the village had "as sturdy a volunteer fire company as can be found anywhere"; with the addition of the new water mains and some new equipment the village would be as well protected from fire as the city. "The one great need of our village at the present time is a good sewerage system," but the village could build one at less expense than could the city. "If the village is annexed, the city Board of Health can order us to fill up our wells and put in Hemlock water, and also order a sewer, and we must pay whatever tax is assessed." On the other hand,

. . . if we wish a sewer we can let the contract to the lowest bidder; our own business men would see that the work was properly done. Hence there would be no unnecessary expense of inspectors and other grafters, as would undoubtedly occur if it were a city job.

Finally, there was the matter of taxation. The combined Village and Brighton School taxes were \$10.50 per \$1,000 assessed valuation. The city tax (which paid City School District costs) was \$17.00/thousand; additionally, the city rate was levied on full valuation, while Brighton Village used 50% valuation. Caley ended his circular by urging residents to approve an upcoming (December 14) referendum to purchase fire equipment. Aside from reinforcing village independence, a favorable vote on this referendum would mean less danger from fire and lower fire insurance rates. The added fire equipment would raise village tax rates \$1.30/thousand.¹⁴

Five days after Caley's circular appeared, the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* published a reply written by one James F. LeClare, "who owns property in Brighton and in Rochester."¹⁵ LeClare began his statement with a caution that low village tax rates would not last. "In the immediate future" village tax payers will have to pay not only \$1,200 for new hose, but also expenses for hose carts, storing, cleaning and drying the hose.

When all this is done, we shall have only a volunteer fire department, with no modern equipment. . . . [(V)olunteers] . . . cannot be expected to be on duty day and night. All these things are taken into consideration by the Board of Underwriters in fixing insurance rates for the village.

LeClare stated the case for sewers in no uncertain terms:

This need is felt more than ever now that we have a water system, with more water used and no means of drainage. A cesspool may answer for a farmhouse in the country where there is plenty of room to get to windward of it, but in a village it is an abomination. I have no doubt the ground in some sections of the village is so saturated from cesspools and outhouses as to make the water in adjacent wells decidedly "doubtful." If this continues a few years longer, with a growing population, the laws of health and of self-preservation, instead of "the mandate of Rochester," will compel the closing of the wells and outhouses.

"A thorough system of sewers" means a great deal. It means a large outlet sewer, thoroughly constructed under the direction of competent engineers, sufficiently large to be adequate for the growing needs of the village for many years to come. . . . These questions are serious ones, and must be met in the near future, or our village will get the reputation of being badly drained and unhealthy, which will seriously affect the value of its real estate.

Following his commentary on the need for sewers, LeClare returned to the question of taxes. He believed that the west end of the village, "comprising about one-fourth of the assessed valuation of the village," could not be held back from joining the city. If the Brighton tax base were reduced by this amount, and increased expenses were added to the village budget, then the tax rate "will soar up well towards that of Rochester in its down-

town section, probably fully as high as that of the outlying wards of Rochester.” The result would be a “homemade sewer” *and* high taxes; “then indeed the lot of those working hard on a small income, to pay for their homes, will be a hard one.” LeClare also countered Caley’s insinuations that a city job would involve graft and unnecessary expense.

I have property both in Rochester and Brighton, have paid taxes and improvements in both places many years, and would as soon take my chances in this respect with the Common Council of Rochester as with the Village Board of Brighton.

According to LeClare, the advantages to be gained by annexation were numerous. In addition to providing sound fire protection and good sewers, the City of Rochester could:

. . . give us the most thorough police protection, of which we are sadly in need at present; . . . abolish nuisances which now exist, and prevent the establishment of more; . . . regulate the erection of buildings, and prevent structures which are fire traps and a constant menace to surrounding property; . . . regulate our draining and plumbing methods; . . . give us the most prompt mail service, with delivery by carrier; . . . see that our street improvements are properly made, and the line and grade of walks permanently established, so one laying is not obliged to raise, lower, or move them at the caprice of every incoming village board; . . . run our affairs on thorough business principles, so that we shall no longer be looked upon as an easy mark by every outside corporation looking for a graft.

Moreover, LeClare felt that annexation was in line with “the march of Progress.” He predicted that trying to run a “‘one-horse’ municipal government” on land adjacent to a large, progressive, and growing city was doomed to failure. If Brighton Village did not join the city wholesale, its fate would be to be annexed piecemeal.

The only unpleasant thing I can see about annexation is that we should probably lose our genial Village Board. While we should all, no doubt, shed some tears at the parting with them in that capacity, I beg to remind them that there will be new and higher positions opening before them if Brighton should become a new ward of

Rochester, for the voters are yet here. Who knows?—perhaps our worthy president may yet become mayor of “Greater Rochester.”

A few days after the publication of LeClare’s statement, another annexationist spokesman, attorney James S. Havens, also spoke strongly in favor “of annexing at least a part of the town of Brighton to the city.”¹⁶ Havens had been one of the petitioners seeking authorization for construction of a Blossom Road sewer from the Streets and Sewers Committee. His residence was on East Avenue just beyond the city line. Havens’ remarks are of interest since they expressed the point of view of the west end property owners. Like LeClare, Havens felt that village tax rates would soon rise to the level of the city’s. In return for paying these higher tax rates, property owners of the west end would continue to be shortchanged in service:

The reason I want to get into the city is that all the taxes I pay to the village of Brighton bring me practically nothing in return. I receive no police protection, and very little fire protection. If my house should catch fire, the chances are I should have to depend on the courtesy of the Rochester fire department to put it out. . . .

Along with other residents of Brighton Village, on December 14 Havens had the opportunity to vote on a village spending issue which tested both confidence in the Brighton volunteer fire company, and, indirectly, opinion on the annexation question. This was the referendum which Morrill J. Caley supported in his circular of a week before. The proposal before the voters was for the purchase of \$1,200 worth of fire hose. Although this was a small matter, the leaders of both the annexationist parties viewed the referendum as relative to Brighton’s future independence. Support for improving the village fire equipment implied support for maintaining the independent fire company, which in turn could be interpreted as a popular (if less than decisive) mandate for maintaining village independence. The fire hose referendum was the first in a series of votes taken in the upcom-

ing weeks which tested opinion on the annexation issue.

If either side on the annexation issue had anticipated a strong expression of voter sentiment on December 14, they were disappointed. Out of a potential electorate of over 150, only fifty-eight persons came to the polls. The proposal to purchase new fire hose was carried by a vote of thirty-five to twenty-one. The implications for annexation were ambiguous: while oppositionists claimed that the favorable result showed a lack of desire to join the city, annexationists claimed that the small turnout reflected support for their cause.¹⁷

Meanwhile, the Streets and Sewers Committee had taken official action on the Blossom Road petition. Not at all suprisingly, it rejected the petitioners' request for the special sewer permit and instead recommended to the Common Council that the western end of Brighton Village should be annexed immediately.¹⁸ The Common Council and the city administration were receptive to this suggestion. While delaying for the time being formal announcements or official action, the city quietly began laying plans for a limited annexation. On December 17, newspapers reported that the city Corporation Counsel's office was drafting an annexation bill.¹⁹

At the same time the Brighton Village Board was laying plans in great haste for an independent sewer system. Early in December the board engaged a Buffalo engineer to survey the village's sewer problem and by January 3, 1905, they were ready to announce progress. The engineer had supplied a maximum cost estimate of \$60,000. The board said they would seek voter approval of the plan in a referendum on January 18 along with authorization for borrowing the necessary funds on thirty-year village bonds to pay for it.²⁰

While the village board had been making ready for its independent sewer proposal, the village annexationists had not been idle. At a village meeting held the evening of the same day the

sewer plans were published, the annexationist group presented a petition “representing something like \$325,000” of the village’s \$800,000 assessed valuation. At the moment the petition was presented, the board was discussing details of the fire hose purchase with the assembled citizens. The petitioners objected to spending any village money if annexation was imminent. The petitioners said they planned to attend the next meeting of the Rochester Common Council, on January 10, to request annexation of the village. In reaction, Village Board President Andrew Miller promised that the people would have a say in the matter. Newspaper accounts of the meeting reported that the annexationists appeared to have more strength than was supposed.²¹

The reason for this apparent growth in the annexationist party, according to a lengthy analysis in the *Herald*, was that west end leaders of the annexation movement were picking up supporters in the eastern end of the village as well. It had become common knowledge that the city was laying plans to take the valuable western end. At this point few people were certain if the city would, or could force the issue over the objections of the Village Board, or even, for that matter, what the exact boundaries of the territory were that would be described in the bill the Corporation Counsel was preparing. It was known, however, that the property owners of the west end would eagerly agree to annexation with or without the rest of the village; their wishes could not be ignored. Annexationists in the eastern end reasoned that if the west end were lost, the village tax base would be so reduced that they would be faced with high taxes and no increase in services. It would therefore be better to have the entire village join the city, and receive in return for higher city tax rates the prospect of city services. Also, the annexationists argued that the village needed a new police station, fire house, and school. They estimated that the cost of these new buildings would be \$150,000. If the village joined the city as a whole, the fiscal resources of

Rochester, drawn on tens of thousands of taxpayers, could absorb this large capital outlay with relative ease.²²

At the January 10 Common Council meeting, Mayor Cutler proposed that the city should annex the whole of Brighton Village. With this sudden move, Cutler neutralized the fear of piecemeal annexation and effectively torpedoed the Village Board's independent sewer plan. The oppositionist village officials, in laying plans for continued independence, had hoped that village residents would support the independent sewer as a means for holding the west end. Their reasoning was remarkably similar to that of the eastern annexationists, who also held out the fear of losing the west end, but who had arrived at an opposite conclusion on what to do about it.

By proposing wholesale annexation, Cutler outmaneuvered the Brighton officials. The Mayor probably had mixed motives. On the one hand, he had succeeded in appearing open-handed; the *Herald* described his annexation proposal as "the fairer plan." He had also put the long-range interests of greater Rochester ahead of short-range economic considerations. The city would get no bargain in taking the whole of Brighton Village: the anticipated tax revenues from the added territory might not adequately compensate the city—in the short run—for the cost of providing a full range of services throughout the area. Recognition of this fact was one of the reasons observers had anticipated only a limited annexation proposal.²³

The immediate effect of Cutler's action was to throw confusion into the camp of the oppositionists. On January 16, two days before the village referendum on an independent sewer and six days after the mayor had proposed annexation of the entire village, officials of the village conferred in open meeting with the Board of the Town of Brighton. The result, according to the *Herald*, was "one of the most incoherent meetings ever held:"

Some there were who favored the annexation of the entire town, some wanted the village annexed, others a strip near the city line; there were those who favored sewers, those who opposed sewers, and those who wanted to get square with the village board for allowing the Rochester, Syracuse & Eastern Railway Company a franchise to run through the village. Altogether the meeting was a delightful affair, filled with many pleasantries. Each man was very certain of what he wanted, but none seemed to be quite sure just why he wanted it; or, if he was sure, he took good care not to mention his reasons, but rather grandiloquently talked of the good of the town or the village.

During the meeting, at which “. . . he who had the most vital . . . vocal apparatus held the floor . . .,” nothing was definitely accomplished. Apparently, the main purpose of the meeting was for the Village Board to have an opportunity to persuade the voters to support their independent sewer plan.²⁴

But the Board's efforts to secure a favorable outcome on the sewer referendum were to no avail. On the morning of January 18, “(B)oth parties on the annexation question had sleighs ready to take the voters to the polls,”²⁵ indicating that both sides felt the determination of the independent sewer question would be crucial to the village's future independence. The villagers soundly defeated the measure by a vote of 85 to 45—a result which, if nothing else, indicated they were not apathetic; there were 130 resident taxpayers.²⁶ The immediate reasons for the defeat of the independent sewer plan were probably threefold. Mayor Cutler's announcement of the previous week had not only reinforced the annexationists' position for reasons already cited, but had also had the effect of creating a “wait and see” attitude among the Brighton voters. Especially those voters who had not followed the annexation debate closely probably saw little point in launching an expensive independent project if annexation were imminent. A second influence on the voters was a statement issued by the city tax assessors a few days before the referendum. In the statement, the city assessors assured village taxpayers that in the

event of annexation assessments would not be raised, “. . . with the exception of a few inequalities which ought to be rectified.” Moreover, they said that village farmlands would be assessed as farmland, “. . . and in some cases this would mean lowering of assessments.”²⁷ If the voters had feared Village Clerk Calcy’s implied warning that the city tax authorities would double village assessments from half to full valuation, they were no doubt reassured to the degree they placed credit in the Rochester assessors’ statement.

A third reason for the defeat of the sewer referendum may have reflected the normal reluctance of some voters to approve of any new government expenditure. There may exist a mathematically constant proportion of any electorate who are automatically negative on spending issues. In the history of twentieth century annexations, those people, who were governed by the same impulse to minimize taxes that most often motivated the opponents of annexation, sometimes contributed to the delay of providing needed urban services with the interesting result that annexation of a given area was hastened.

The Village Board, seeing that the independent sewer issue was lost, called for another referendum to be held on January 26. This time the voters would express their wishes on the larger question of joining the city. Before the referendum could take place, however, the village annexationists fought with the Board about extending voting privileges to persons who were not able to vote in the last referendum. The Board wanted to limit voting to resident taxpayers, the same group that had defeated the independent sewer. The annexationists wished to broaden the electorate to include non-taxpaying residents and non-resident taxpayers: the former group had no reason to fear city taxes, and the latter group included the absentee landowners who had initiated the movement toward annexation in the first place. The annexationists successfully persuaded the Board to permit all

taxpayers of the village to vote, but not non-taxpaying residents.²⁸

The outcome of the village referendum on annexation was so close that differing newspaper reports initially granted victory to both sides. On January 27, the *Democrat and Chronicle* reported that annexation was defeated 84 to 83. On the same day, the *Herald* announced that "The annexationists won squarely . . ." by a vote of 84 to 83. Although the *Herald* distorted the truth in describing the victory as decisive, its report of a favorable outcome on the referendum proved correct.²⁹ In the wake of the referendum, annexationist leaders claimed that the vote would have been more decisively positive if all village residents had been permitted to vote; they were no doubt consoled by the following statement in the *Herald*:

In spite of the handicap in the shape of an organized village ring that controlled the calling of elections and in many ways sought to hamper the recording of a fair expression of opinion, the annexationists defeated the village Board at all points.

Defeat in two referendums nine days apart meant the loss of the oppositionist cause in Brighton Village. Before an annexation bill was to pass the Legislature, however, the city would suffer reversals in attempting to make full use of the initiative it had gained. Attempts to include a large section of the Town of Brighton north of the village and part of Irondequoit in the bill were successfully resisted by affected officials and residents. These areas were later annexed in 1914. The city did manage to have its adjacent Cobbs Hill reservoir lands included in the bill for the annexation of Brighton Village. By March 24, both houses of the Legislature had passed the bill despite half-hearted objections by lobbyists for the Rochester and Lake Ontario Water Company (which wanted to maintain its suburban markets). In conformity with the Local Law provisions of the Constitution, the Legislature sent the bill to Rochester for the city's official approval. The bill was debated briefly in the Common

Council on March 31. Largely as a matter of form, the Democratic minority on the Council opposed the measure, expressing the belief that annexation of the village would be a losing proposition for the city. The Mayor and the Council Republicans refused to debate at length, since their majority was assured, but did speak of the growth of "Greater Rochester." The Council approved the bill by a vote of twelve to four, and Governor Frank W. Higgins signed the bill making Brighton Village the Twenty-First Ward of Rochester on April 5, 1905.³⁰

The addition of Brighton Village to the city in 1905 was by no means the largest annexation, in terms of either area or population, to take place in the course of Rochester's twenty-five year era of twentieth century annexations. Nor was it the most difficult annexation to accomplish. The village's proximate location to the city's built-up east side and its own state of development virtually dictated the logic of immediate annexation. Moreover, the city's efforts were ably abetted by a coterie of hard-core annexationists in the village, led by wealthy and respected taxpayers some of whom had petitioned the city for connection in the first place. But the annexation of Brighton Village was significant as an introduction to similar events which would take place during the next two decades. Although subsequent annexation attempts differed in many particulars, the debate over urban services and city taxation would be re-enacted repeatedly. Similar divisions would reappear between those who argued for coordinating the growth of their neighborhood with that of the expanding urban community and those who clung to the immediate economies of independence. And during later events, the city's lackadaisical conviction in the inevitability of all annexations combined with the shortsightedness of many suburbanites would eventually become an incurable weakness.

NOTES

1. W. Earl Weller, "Expanding Boundaries of Rochester," *Rochester Historical Society Publication Fund Series*, Vol. XIV (Rochester: 1936), p. 181.
2. U.S. Census, *Population Series*, 1910.
3. Weller, pp. 179-181; Blake McKelvey, "East Avenue's Turbulent History," *Rochester History*, Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 2 & 3 (April & July, 1966).
4. William F. Peck et al., *Landmarks of Monroe County, New York* Boston 1895). p. 241.
5. J. M. Lathrop & Co., *Platbook of Monroe County, New York* 1902 (Philadelphia: 1902).
6. U.S. Census, *Population Series*, 1900, 1910.
7. *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, Jan. 3, 1905.
8. *Rochester Herald, D & C*, Nov. 22, 1904.
9. Charles Z. Lincoln, *The Constitutional History of New York*, Vol. IV, *The Annotated Constitution*, pp. 775-786. For the history on this constitutional provision see Lincoln, Vol. III, *The Constitutional History of New York* 1894-1905. (Rochester: 1905), pp. 620-652.
10. *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, Jan. 19, 1905; *D & C*, Mar. 27, 1915.
11. *Herald*, Dec. 3, 1904.
12. *Rochester Post Express*, Dec. 2, 1904.
13. *Herald*, Dec. 3, 8, 13, 1904.
14. *U & A*, Dec. 9, 1904.
15. *D & C*, Dec. 14, 1904.
16. *U & A*, Dec. 19, 1904.
17. *D & C*, Dec. 15, 1904.
18. *D & C*, Dec. 13, 1904.
19. *U & A*, Dec. 19, 1904.
20. *Herald*, Dec. 8, 1904; *Rochester Evening Times, D & C*, Jan. 3, 1905.
21. *D & C, Herald, U & A*, Jan. 4, 1905.
22. *Herald*, Jan. 3, 1905.
23. *Herald*, Dec. 13, 31, 1904, Jan. 3, 12, 1905; *PE*, Dec. 2, 1904.
24. *Herald*, Jan. 17, 1905.
25. *D & C*, Jan. 19, 1905.
26. *Herald*, Jan. 19, 1905.
27. *U & A*, Jan. 12, 1905.
28. *U & A*, Jan. 26, 1905.
29. *Herald, D & C*, Jan. 27, 1905.
30. *Herald*, Mar. 24, April 1, 1905; *Times*, April 6, 1905.