

# Was One of Many Turnpike Roads

Democrat & Chronicle, 5 Jul 1905, Wednesday

## Charlotte Boulevard Reclaimed at Last First Built of Hemlock

Only Important Toll Road County Has Bought, Says L. M. Otis, City Treasurer  
With Others it did good Service for Many Years

In the adoption of a resolution by this board of Supervisors Monday, it was formerly decided that the toll road from Rochester to Charlotte should be purchased of the Rochester & Charlotte Turnpike Road Company for \$6,000 and the road abolished as a turnpike road. The resolution provides that of this amount \$4,000 shall be assessed upon the town of Greece and \$2,000 upon the other towns of the county and the city of Rochester, in proportion to the assessed valuations of the property in them.

Following the passage of a state law in 1847, Lyman M. Otis, city treasurer, said yesterday, plank turnpike roads were built from Rochester to several surrounding villages. This law enabled companies to organize for the building and maintaining of plank roads in the state, and gave them power to collect tolls on them.

"There were of course, turnpike roads throughout the state before this time," said Mr. Otis, but the law of '47 provided for the building of plank roads, and a number of these were established here as soon as it was possible to build them.

"I think the Brighton plank road was first built. All of the roads were built in the two or three years after the passage of the law. The longest of these roads was that built from Rochester to Hemlock Lake, which had a length of 26 miles. It ran from Rochester through Rush, Honeoye Falls and Lima to Hemlock Lake.

### First Plank Road Inspector

"In this time the Rochester to Gates plank road, in the Buffalo road, was built. A road from the city to Spencerport was an extension of Lake avenue, on the little Ridge road to Greece. After these were built the Rochester to Charlotte, Rochester to Webster and Rochester to Pittsford plank roads. The Rochester and West Henrietta plank road began in Mt. Hope avenue. The road to Hemlock Lake went out South avenue.

One of the toll gates of the road into West Henrietta was about where the upper entrance to Mt. Hope cemetery now is. There was another toll gate in Monroe avenue, on Cobbs Hill. It seems to me that the old toll gate is still standing there. It was of course on the road from the city to Pittsford.

Three inspectors were appointed by the county, whose business it was to see that the plank roads were kept in repair. The first three inspectors, elected in 1848, were Louis Selye, Enoch Strong and Joshua Tripp.

The tollgates were so placed as to catch as much traffic as possible. It was not an uncommon thing in those days for young men to "run" the tollgate. If they did this often, the gatekeeper

would have them arrested and fines imposed. This action often led to counter suits being brought. If the roads were not kept in good condition, the tolls could not be collected. Because of the roads being blocked by snow in the winter or some other unsatisfactory condition, those who had been fined found ways of retaliating upon the gatekeepers. On nights such as the fourth of July, the tollmen would sit up until 12 o'clock to collect of the young men returning home. As a rule the gates were open at night.

### How roads were Built

There was a great need for good roads at the time of the plank road law. The farmers to the south then had to haul their produce to Rochester. The Genesee Valley railroad was not then built. That is the road in which Rochester held stock to the amount of \$300,000 until a year ago. It is now leased to the Erie Railroad Company. The building of the plank roads was before the Niagara Falls branch of the New York Central was built. Rochester had at that time the service of the New York Central railroad over the Auburn road, and the line west to Buffalo. "How were the plank roads built?" Mr. Otis was asked.

"The planks used were 3 inch hemlock," he replied, and were laid on 3 by 6 or 2 by 6 stringers. The plank road was 8 feet wide, and the sides of the road was graded up to it."

"It wouldn't seem that Hemlock plank, under heavy traffic in all weather, would last much longer than a year in a road," said a reporter.

"The plank roads lasted fairly well" Mr. Otis replied. Hemlock is mean enough, but it isn't quite as mean as that. It was several years before the new hemlock roads required to be repaired. The handsomest plank road I ever saw, he added "was one in Ohio. It was made of oak, and it lasted I don't know how long.

### Used Much for Many Years

For a number of years the plank roads were used a great deal. Early in the morning of winter and fall days I have seen a length of teams of half a mile before the tollgate on the Hemlock Lake road, waiting to be admitted to the city. There is little teaming today compared with that of forty years ago. Then there was cordwood to be brought to town and bark from Webster and grain for flour mills and three or four distilleries. There was one distillery on Wolcott street, and 300 or 400 were always kept on the refuge from it. Another was on St. Paul street. There used to be a distillery at Cartersville.

"It cost quite a little for toll fare when the plank roads were used so much, and the farmers used to try every scheme for avoiding paying it. Some would go to the city on the plank roads and return home another way. A man driving a team had to pay 2 cents a mile; if driving one horse, he paid 1 cent a mile.

"The charters of the companies controlling the turnpike roads expired, I think, in thirty years. Perhaps it was twenty years. In either case, boards of supervisors, sometimes refused to

renew the charters. When I was supervisor, I remember that we would not grant further permission to one company.

### Only One To Be Bought By County

"Then the roads ceased to be profitable after a time. Lumber became so dear that the roads could not be repaired with it, and gravel was often used. During the Civil War the price of lumber doubled. The building of railroads greatly decreased traffic on and thus the profit on plank roads.

"When the companies began to build the plank roads, hemlock could be bought for \$6 to \$8 a thousand, delivered at Rochester. Some of it came from Canada, some from south of the city. The timber that came by the lake was unloaded at the upper landing, near Driving Park avenue bridge. We used to have to team it up old Buell avenue. Yes, it was a heavy pull. It required four horses to draw a thousand feet of lumber up the hill. Almost all of the lumber used in the plank roads was hemlock. The lumber from Dansville and other places to the south came by way of the Genesee Valley canal.

"The Rochester to Charlotte road is, I believe, the only one of importance to be bought by the Board of Supervisors. The charters of the others ran out, or they were abandoned. The company owning the road to Charlotte was reorganized, I think, about 1875, and at that time the present boulevard was built of slag from the Charlotte blast furnaces. The reason it has remained a toll road is that it was much more profitable than the others. Its stock has been largely in the hands of the Rochester Railway Company, I am told. A few years ago a state law was passed, giving counties power to purchase toll roads, and the Charlotte road is to be bought under this law.