

3.1 EARLY SETTLEMENT

The Town of Charlotte was founded in June 1762, when Benning Wentworth, Royal Governor of the Province of New Hampshire, granted charter to a group of 65 men in Duchess County, New York, for the Town "Charlotta," in the name of King George III, and in honor of his bride, the German princess Charlotta Sophia of Mecklenburg Strelitz.

Thousands of years before this event the land that was to be Charlotte lay beneath the glacier, and after its receding, beneath cold glacial seas. Marine fossils can still be found in the fertile valley that remains. When the Rutland & Burlington Railway was cut through Charlotte in 1849, the bones of a small whale were found just north of Thompson's Point Road.

Before its settlement by Europeans, the land was home to nomadic American Indians, probably Algonquins, who camped and hunted in the heavily forested, rolling terrain where bear, deer, beaver, and all manner of animal life prospered.

Although some of their children did, none of the original proprietors ever settled in Charlotte. They were the first of the Town's landowners with, as W.S. Rann relates in *The History of Chittenden County, Vermont*, the "desire to buy cheap and sell dear." Consequently, they "did little more than open roads, construct bridges, and provide for the building of the necessary mills, in order to increase the market value of their property."¹

The first settler of Charlotte is said to be Derrick Webb, of English/Dutch origin, who, in March of 1776, arrived and left, as he did again the following spring. The true settlers of Charlotte came, Webb among them, in 1784, and in greater numbers over the next ten years, primarily from Massachusetts and Connecticut. They came alone or with families, up the Champlain Valley following a trail of blazed trees, up the lake from Whitehall by raft, sometimes across the frozen lake. Settlement was rapid, induced in part by the thick forests of oak and pine which were felled and rafted to Quebec for the masting of the Royal Navy of Great Britain. The settlers soon found the good soil, gentle slopes and flat, well-drained meadows of Charlotte to be ideally suited to agriculture, which quickly became their principal industry.

In less than ten years, Charlotte was the county's largest settlement, a town of 635. James Hill and his family had settled on Hill's Bay, at a place still known as Hill's Point. John McNeil had arrived from Litchfield, Connecticut and, using a sailing vessel, established a ferry service to Essex, New York. Land was cleared, wheat was planted, roads were opened and Charlotte was a major stop on the stage route from Montreal to southern New England and New York.

In many ways, water determined the pattern of colonial development in Charlotte. Holmes Creek, emptying into the lake in the northwestern corner of Town, just south of Hill's Point, powered the Town's first gristmill and drew development in the west. The covered bridge at the Town Beach marks this historic site. The lake itself and the advantages of ferry transportation offered further incentives to western settlement. In Charlotte Center, just at the intersection of what are now Church Hill and Hinesburg Roads, arose a fresh, clear spring which provided settlers with good drinking water and fostered development. Farther to the east were Lewis Creek and the "LaPlotte" River, ideally suited to powering the gristmills and sawmills that were needed in the growing community.

¹ Rann, W.S. *The History of Chittenden County, Vermont*, Syracuse, 1886, p. 535.

Also critical to the pattern of Charlotte's development is the ridge of hills which runs north/south, Mutton Hill, Pease Mountain, Mt. Philo, dividing the Town through its center, separating east from west and limiting their mutual access. Not only has it led to the growth of separate villages, some feel it has demonstrated how "peoples separated by territorial barriers cannot always be at one in sentiment."² As early as 1869, the *Vermont Historical Gazetteer* said "the effect has been a separation of interest, mutual jealousy, and want of harmony between the two sections."

Be that as it may, villages developed in three distinct spots: Charlotte Four Corners, at what is now the intersection of Greenbush and Ferry Roads; Charlotte Center, on Church Hill Road; and Baptist Corners, at what is now the intersection of Hinesburg Road and Spear Street.

² Rann, W.S. *The History of Chittenden County, Vermont*, Syracuse, 1886, p. 535.

Charlotte Four Corners

Charlotte Four Corners developed quickly from its earliest days as a crossroads, with gristmill to the north, ferry to the west. In 1811, Joseph Barton built his tavern at the northwest corner, famous for its upstairs ballroom with a swing floor. The Methodists built a church in 1823. Sixty years later the corner was home to two stores, a shoe shop, a blacksmith's shop, the Charlotte Female Seminary, a cheese factory which produced 40,000 pounds of cheese a year, a post office and, just to the west, the railroad station. In 1882, at the railroad depot, Wilbur Fields operated a hay barn and hay press which received and pressed some 700 tons of hay a year. In the later part of the 1800s, John Holmes had a 100-acre orchard on a slope overlooking the lake, and a dock on Hill's Bay from which he shipped apples not only to cities across the United States, but also to London.

Thompson's Point

The late 19th century saw the rise of two unique communities in the west of Charlotte. The first was at Thompson's Point at the south end of Converse Bay. The Town of Charlotte purchased the entire point of land in 1839 and has owned it ever since. Its earliest use was for a 'poor farm' supported in part by tent camping, but in the late 1800s, striking Gothic cottages were built on lots leased from the Town, and a thriving summer community evolved.

Cedar Beach

Cedar Beach was the site of another summer colony which developed in Charlotte, but in a manner quite different from Thompson's Point. In 1872, J.T. Bagley, a gentleman from Burlington selected a campsite and pitched his tent for a few weeks of summer camping. He so enjoyed himself that the next summer he invited friends to join him and the "Jolly Club" at Cedar Beach was born. From one cottage in 1873, the community grew over the next ten years to include an ice house, a stable, a large pier, many cottages and some 1,000 people. In 1883, the Jolly Club became the Cedar Beach Association, Inc., more houses were built, and improvements made. The pier was extended to facilitate the docking of the great lake steamers which stopped in the morning to pick up commuters to Burlington and returned them to their families in the evening. For the next 30 years or more, the colony prospered, a utopian summer community of swimming and boating, card games, dances, and canoes of young singers floating in the moonlit night. The Association and the camps still remain, but the end of steamer service on the lake signaled the close of an era at Cedar Beach.

Church Hill Road

Progress on Church Hill Road was early and swift, as it quickly became the principal stage road north to Burlington. In 1786, Hezekiah Barnes, Captain in the Colonial Army and later General of the Vermont Militia, with his wife and four children, settled and built a large log tavern next to the great spring. Across the road, on the southeast corner of the intersection, General Barnes established a trading post. Added to and changed over the years, the structure stands today. In 1789, he added the stone house, now the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Pinney. In 1790, Gen. Barnes's clientele overflowed the log tavern, and he built a substantial frame tavern with ten fireplaces just north of the stone house. This building served many purposes over the years and ended as a two-family tenement in the 1940s. It stood empty when in 1948 Mr. and Mrs. J. Watson Webb purchased the building for the Shelburne Museum, where it now stands proudly

renovated as the Stage Coach Inn. When stage travel was at its peak, Gen. Barnes kept a team of oxen in yoke day and night to help teamsters through the mud, up the steep hill to the north. With the decline of stage travel, this hill became a sledding favorite for young Charlotters of the 1880s and '90s.

The Congregational Church was the first church in Charlotte, built in Charlotte Center in 1798. The Charlotte Town House, or Town hall, was built in 1850; it now houses the Charlotte Museum. By 1880, Alanson Edgerton and Sons operated a cider mill, horse-powered, which produced 20 barrels a day, 700 a year, from apples grown along Greenbush Road, Hill's Point, and Mt. Philo Road. These farmers shipped their best apples by freight to New York City and took the remaining apples to the mill for cider and vinegar. H.D. Alexander had a vineyard and fruit farm on Church Hill Road with several thousand choice vines covering eight acres.

Baptist Corners

Baptist Corners saw early growth and industry. In 1798, Gad Root ran a tannery and shoe shop; in 1807, the Baptist Church was built which gave the settlement its name. By 1815, the section of Spear Street between Carpenter Road and the Four Corners boasted a brickyard, blacksmith shop, gristmill, sawmill, chair factory and marble mill. Lewis Creek just north of what is now the Quinlan covered bridge was the site of many mills. Both covered bridges across Lewis Creek saw great activity; sawmills, gristmills, clothing mills, woodworking mills, a cooper's shop, a butter tub manufactory and a foundry were all established along the banks of the creek. By 1858, Baptist Corners was home to a Catholic Church as well. In 1870, the Charlotte Young Men's Literary Club had raised funds to build the Lyceum Hall where the club, renamed the East Charlotte Lecture Association, carried out spirited debates on Friday nights. Lyceum Hall now houses the Charlotte Grange.

3.3 ROLE OF AGRICULTURE

Despite its mills and smithies, taverns and stores, Charlotte's principal industry was always agriculture, as its pattern of development demonstrates; apart from the villages, settlements in Charlotte were individual and widely separated. In its colonial days, Charlotte's agriculture was one of self-sufficiency; cattle were kept for milk, butter, cheese and beef, as well as for shoe and harness leather; sheep provided mutton and wool; swine, turkey, geese and chickens were kept for family use; maple products provided sweetness in lieu of imported sugar; and wheat, corn and oats were grown for family needs and livestock feed.³ "The superior adaptation of the Town to agricultural purposes was one cause of its rapid settlement."⁴ As early as 1806, the grand list of Charlotte was \$31,961, surpassed by only ten other towns in the state.

Because of its excellent farming, by the early 1800s, the Champlain Valley was known as New England's breadbasket. Wheat was of great economic importance and was taken to markets in Albany and Troy, New York. Dairy and poultry products found their way as far as the markets in Boston. In 1806, Charlotte had eight hotels, supported in great part by farmers on their way to market. This shift from self-sufficiency to a market-oriented agriculture was aided by changes in transportation, in particular the building of the southern canals. The addition of a railroad to Charlotte in 1849 contributed greatly to the ability to reach other markets. By 1837, a large industry of Merino sheep breeding had developed in the area for export to Australia and the west. After the Civil War, Australian wool was, in turn, flooding the American market, and dairying became dominant in the valley, primarily in the form of butter and cheese production.

By the 1880s, competition from western markets, and later from oleomargarine, transformed the dairy industry, and the shift to fluid milk began. With the advent of the automobile and the truck and highway system, Charlotte farmers were able to reach the big Boston market with their high quality milk.

In the late 1800s, Charlotte produced some notable agriculturists including field botanist Cyrus Pringle, a renowned collector and hybridizer, whose extensive collections were housed in UVM's Pringle Herbarium. Orson Alexander introduced eight new potato varieties including the still dependable "Green Mountain." Frederick Hinsdale Horsford, who studied botany and later specialized in hybridizing, introduced the telephone pea and "Little Giant Corn." He and Pringle went into the nursery business in 1883. By 1893, Horsford had bought out Pringle's interest and established the F.H. Horsford Nursery at its present site. Horsford went on to become internationally known as a pioneer in lilies. His sons and grandsons continued his horticultural work.

The 1900s saw a decrease in the number of farms in Charlotte. As has been the case throughout the Champlain Basin, farm size and herd size have tended to increase. An increase of herd size has generally meant an increase in the amount of pasture land a farmer must have, a development that can be extremely expensive in an urbanizing area.

Since the end of World War II, economic opportunities in Vermont have increased, decreasing the economic importance of agriculture in the region. Yet if one considers the income from recreation and tourism, much of which is related to a working rural landscape, and the income

³ Lapping, Mark B. *Shelburne Farms: The History of an Agricultural Estate*, p. 77.

⁴ Beers Atlas, 1869.

from those economic opportunities which are drawn to Vermont because of its high quality, rural life, then agriculturally-derived income is still substantial in the State.⁵

⁵ Lapping, Mark B. *Shelburne Farms: The History of an Agricultural Estate*, p. 78.

The municipal history of Charlotte is a straightforward one. The first Town Meeting was held in Moses Yale's log cabin facing Converse Bay on July 6, 1785. The Town was officially organized at a meeting in March 1787 at which men were elected to serve as clerk, constables, selectmen, listers, leather sealer, half-tithing men, surveyors of highways, and sealer of weights and measures. Twelve prominent men were appointed jurymen. It was decided that hogs should be confined. In 1786, Daniel Horsford was elected first justice. John McNeil was elected as the first representative to the legislature of the independent Republic of Vermont in 1788.

By 1886, Town offices included: Selectmen, Treasurer, Town Clerk, Constable and Tax Collector, Overseer of the Poor, Listers (3), Auditors, Trustee of Public Money, Fence Viewers, Grand Jurors, Inspector of Leather, Inspector of Wood and Shingles, Superintendent of Thompson's Point, Town Agent, and Superintendent of Schools.

In 1869, Charlotte had 14 school districts; by 1948, nine remained. In 1949, the four remaining districts were consolidated and Charlotte Central School was built. An addition to the school was completed in 1968 and a kindergarten added. Further additions were completed in 1989 and 1997 providing additional classrooms, gymnasiums, and support facilities. Today, students in kindergarten through 8th grade attend CCS. Charlotte high school students, with students from Hinesburg, St. George, Williston and Shelburne, attend Champlain Valley Union High School built in Hinesburg in 1963.

It was not until the mid-1960s that Charlotte developed planning and zoning ordinances to control growth over the Town's 26,520 acres and to protect its resources. Interestingly enough, those resources have not changed significantly since Charlotte's earliest days; the superior soil and breathtaking environment are still valuable assets.

3.5 THE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE PLAN

3.5.1 Previous Town Plans

The Charlotte Planning Commission is responsible for developing the plan. For the first Town Plan, the Planning Commission sought broad citizen involvement. Work began in earnest in 1984 when an advisory committee submitted preliminary findings and conclusions on planning issues to the Planning Commission. In 1986, a questionnaire was distributed at Town Meeting to obtain public opinion on the most pressing planning issues.

1990 Plan

In July 1987, the Planning Commission took a significant step to involve the community in planning for its future. With the assistance of the Town's planning consultant, the commission organized eight citizen committees to research issues important to the Town and to develop recommendations for future action. The committees were Housing, Farming, Pattern of Future Growth, Lake Champlain and its Shoreline, Community Facilities and Services, Town Environment, Natural Resources, and Commercial and Industrial Development. The committees were given instructions on what tasks they were to accomplish, the form for their reports, and the time-frame for their work.

Three months later the committees presented their findings in a town-wide meeting. The results of the committees' work were astounding. Utilizing the talent and commitment of residents, the Town was able to obtain detailed analysis of its natural resources, the farm economy, affordable housing opportunities, water quality data for Lake Champlain, commercial and industrial potential, and significant vistas and other items. The reports were pulled together in papers summarizing goals, objectives, and strategies for the Town. Each committee then reviewed these papers.

A town-wide meeting was held in August 1988. The proposed land use strategy was presented, with slides illustrating the significant features and pressing planning issues facing the Town, and public comment was solicited. Many summer residents, as well as year-round residents, were present at that meeting. Maps of the Town showing the proposed land use strategy were then displayed in the Town planning office. People were invited to comment on the maps and to discuss questions or comments with the Planning Commission. Neighborhood meetings were held in the East Charlotte and West Charlotte villages. Both the Planning Commission and the Selectboard held public hearings to obtain formal comments on the Plan. The most significant public involvement in the formulation of the plan was through the survey, committee work, and informal discussions with neighborhood groups and individuals.

In response to a petition signed by Charlotte residents, the Selectboard warned a public meeting to determine by Australian ballot whether town plans would be voted on by Australian ballot at duly warned Town Meetings. Residents voted in favor of a Town vote on plans. The 1990 Town Plan was the Town's first "Act 200 Plan." This meant that the plan was developed and adopted according to the procedures of Act 200. These procedures include requirements that the plan be consistent with statewide goals and

policies set forth in Section 4302 of Chapter 117 and be compatible with the approved plans of adjoining municipalities and the regional plan.

1995 Plan

In August 1994, the Planning Commission decided, provided the plan's statistical information was updated, that the Town Plan should be re-adopted. This decision relied upon two premises:

1. Considerable effort and public participation was conducted to develop the plan as originally adopted by Australian Ballot at the March 1990 Town Meeting; and
2. Based on the confidence in the process to develop the plan, the policies, goals, objectives, and other pertinent sections remained applicable for the ensuing five years.

Between 1994 and 1998 zoning bylaws in the Conservation and Industrial areas were amended.

2002 Plan

In January 1999, the Planning Commission began a comprehensive assessment of the Plan for the 2000 update with the help of a part-time planning consultant and Town staff. Seven Town Plan Update Committees were established and chaired by Planning Commissioners, their task being to review the existing Plan and make recommendations for any changes based on updated information and trends. The committees were: Housing; Economy; Community Facilities and Transportation; Agriculture; Natural Resources; Lake and the Lakeshore; and Neighborhoods and Villages. Approximately 100 volunteers joined in the work, with many attending weekly community workshops of the various committees over a five-month period, and in this way the Update Committees developed recommendations.

Two written public surveys were also used to collect additional information about residents' desires for Charlotte's future. One survey was placed as an insert to the January 28, 1999 *Charlotte News*. With 125 responses, the results of the survey were published in the *Charlotte News* on March 11, 1999 and discussed at a subsequent community workshop. The second survey, prepared by the Economy Committee, addressed economic development. It was distributed at 1999 Town Meeting. Nearly 90 residents responded and results were discussed at a community workshop. Survey results were integrated throughout the plan and are included in Appendix B.

The Selectboard identified some important unresolved issues remaining in the draft, and so decided to place the 1995 Town Plan on the ballot for re-adoption at the March 2000 Town Meeting, and continue work on the revisions. The 1995 Town Plan was re-approved and adopted by the voters on March 7, 2000.

During the spring and summer of 2000, the Planning Commission and Selectboard worked on a new draft of the Town Plan. Public hearings were held in the fall and winter of 2000. The new draft was on the ballot of the 2001 Town Meeting, and was defeated.

The Planning Commission tried to determine why that version of the plan was not acceptable to the community. They recognized two items in the defeated plan which needed further investigation and evaluation:

1. Rezoning the industrial/commercial district on East Thompson's Point Road to residential, and
2. Language regarding Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) which had been understood to require the Town to enact such a program.

The Planning Commission deleted these sections and voters adopted the Town Plan on March 5, 2002.

The 2002 plan maintained much of the structure and content of the earlier plans; the main structural change being the delineation of policies and strategies in some of the plan's sections. The principal content change was the added focus on the villages, particularly the West Charlotte Village.

The reasons for this focus were twofold. First, the West Charlotte Village has become, within the last ten years, a real town center where municipal, cultural/social, postal and commercial services are provided. The fact that this village hosts these services currently and may in the near future provide additional services warrants a close look at how they interrelate and how they can be provided most effectively, efficiently, and aesthetically.

Secondly, in looking forward, the Town's need for housing is projected to grow. The provision of housing in village areas accomplishes several goals:

1. It can address affordability issues by allowing for smaller lots, shared structures and shared infrastructure; and
2. It reinforces the village concept by providing a mixture of residential and commercial uses and also by establishing a clear contrast with the surrounding rural countryside, especially when coupled with protective mechanisms for outlying areas.

The 2002 plan laid the groundwork for future studies, such as groundwater studies, village master plans for the West and East Charlotte Villages, and a town-wide plan for open space protection, in order to assure that future growth in the Town will be environmentally sound and will be in keeping with the current character of the village and non-village areas.

Village Planning

A West Charlotte Village Plan was completed in October 2002. As a majority of the ideas in that plan were not broadly endorsed by the public, the Planning Commission decided not to adopt its recommendations. Nevertheless, the four "goals" identified as the most popular within the plan may hold enough merit today to apply for Village Center Designation with the State of Vermont. An East Charlotte Village Plan was completed in May 2010.

Further detail on the villages that the Town considers as candidates for Village Center Designation are covered in Chapter 1.

3.6 THE LAYOUT OF THE PLAN

The chapter entitled "Goals for the Future of the Town" states the public aspirations and the objectives that will lead to the accomplishment of those aspirations. "Charlotte Yesterday" provides a brief history of the Town. "Charlotte Today" describes the current social, economic, land use, environmental, and community service conditions of the Town. "Charlotte Tomorrow" outlines the policies and strategies necessary to implement the vision for the future of the Town.

3.7 USE OF THE TOWN PLAN

The Town Plan must meet the requirements of Title 24 Chapter 117 Section 4382 of Vermont Statutes Annotated (VSA). Additionally, the Town Plan may be consistent with the goals established in 24 VSA Section 4302, and compatible with approved plans of other municipalities in the region and with the regional plan. However, in order to be approved by the regional planning commission (under the provisions of 24 VSA Section 4350, the Town Plan must be consistent with the goals of Section 4302 and compatible with other municipal plans and with the regional plan.

The Town Plan is intended to guide the work and decisions of the Selectboard, and all official Town boards and bodies, as well as residents, seasonal homeowners, private employers and Town employees.

In some places, the plan specifies policies and these are to be used to review and guide development proposals and use of public resources. In other places, the plan offers suggestions of possible strategies that would need to be enacted, for example, in the Land Use Regulations or through a Town Committee; these suggestions are meant to guide discussion and need further action and scrutiny before implementation.

The purpose of the Town Plan is:

- 📎 To plan for the future of the Town in a manner that the community desires;
- 📎 To provide the basis for revisions to the Land Use Regulations and (if the Town so wishes) for the adoption of an Official Town Map;
- 📎 To guide decision-making under the Land Use Regulations;
- 📎 To provide the framework for a capital budget and program (if adopted);
- 📎 To provide a guide and a resource for community programs and decision-making;
- 📎 To provide a standard for review under the provisions of Title 10 Chapter 151 (Act 250) and Title 30 Chapter 248;
- 📎 To provide a standard for review under the provisions of Title 24 Chapter 117;
- 📎 To assist with the development of the Regional Plan and the plans of neighboring municipalities; and

¶ To serve as a source of information about the Town.

3.8 PROCESS FOR MANAGING AND AMENDING THE PLAN

It is the Planning Commission's responsibility to develop, maintain, review and revise the plan at least every five years. The Planning Commission will review annually the plan to determine progress towards its implementation. As part of this annual review, the Planning Commission will note any changes that should be considered in the next five-year update of the plan.

In preparation for the next update of the plan, the Planning Commission will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current plan. Statistical data on changes occurring over this period will be reviewed, the status and effectiveness of policies and implementation strategies will be reassessed, and assumptions on issues facing the Town reevaluated. With this information policies can be amended and new implementation programs developed as necessary.

Title 24 Chapter 117, Vermont's growth management and planning statute, requires that town plans be consistent with statewide planning goals as provided in the statute, be coordinated with the plans of neighboring municipalities, and be compatible with regional plans. In particular the Town should consult with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, which reviews towns' plans to determine their conformance with the requirements of the statute.

When considering an amendment to the plan, the Planning Commission is required to prepare a written report on the proposal. The contents of the report are specified in Section 4384(c) of the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act.

Charlotte circa 1869 (from Beers Atlas, Tuttle Publishing Company)

