

# **The Evolution of the Rochester Police Department Locust Club**

By

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The Rochester Police Locust Club is the recognized bargaining agent for uniformed officers of the Rochester Police Department. It acts as the union for the city's police force. The Locust Club has not always been a bargaining agent. Initially, the Locust Club operated as a social club for police officers. It became the first club of this type in New York State. The Locust Club was the second police club in the nation, preceded only by a small police department in California.<sup>i</sup> Its goal was to improve conditions for its members in the workplace and to provide a place to socialize. Over the years the club has changed. No longer is the Locust Club solely a social gathering place. It is now an organization that protects police officer's rights and secures their benefits and salaries. This is a full time job for the officers of the club.

The Rochester Police Locust Club started on April 17, 1904. The club's primary concern was "promoting the social, physical welfare and the material improvements of members of the Rochester Police Department".<sup>ii</sup> Certain events took place prior to 1904 to contribute the need for the Locust Club.

Three commissioners in 1899 controlled the Rochester Police Department. These commissioners and the mayor had the power to appoint a Chief of Police and the officers and staff of the Rochester Police Department. In 1899 the City Charter was revised to include changes to the police department. These changes included, but were not limited to, a set of new police ordinances, new uniform provisions and structural and operational

changes. In November 1899 the city elected George A Carnahan mayor. Carnahan became the first mayor to operate utilizing the new city charter. George A Canahan appointed James G. Cutler as commissioner of Public Safety.<sup>iii</sup> On January 30, 1900, the common council adopted a set of police ordinances and five precincts were established.<sup>iv</sup> These ordinances defined the structure and rules of the police department. In May 1902 the common council passed an ordinance that prevented detectives from holding office for a definite tenure. Prior to that they could only be removed for cause.<sup>v</sup> Another ordinance required officers to wear their uniforms 24 hours a day.<sup>vi</sup> These rules and ordinances needed to be revised and made more agreeable to the members of the Rochester Police Department.

Numerous other problems faced officers in 1904. The problems ranged from salary and uniform issues to pension security and pay raises. Younger officers of the day found a need to organize for the common welfare of all officers. Older officers felt that an organization of this type would be frowned upon by city officials.<sup>vii</sup>

In 1904 several officers met after a midnight tour of duty to discuss organizing an association. Officers James B. Bennett, Charles F. Steinmiller and James McD. Ellis met at the corner of South Ave. and Capron St. (the present location of V.H Lang) to start the preliminary steps towards forming an organization.<sup>viii</sup> The Patrolmen's Association, later to be called the Locust Club, had begun.<sup>ix</sup>

In March 1904 coal drivers went on strike against their employers. The coal strike caused officers to work picket lines to ensure the safety of the strikers and to keep the peace. The strike may have inspired the officers to organize to improve their own working conditions.

The step to form such an organization was a bold one; no other mid to large size police department in the country had any type of similar organization. An organization made up of rank and file members coming together to address labor problems within a police department was something new.

Members of the newly formed Patrolmen's Association had begun to meet at the Elks Lodge on South Avenue in Rochester.<sup>x</sup> A decision to form a permanent organization was made. The members voted new leaders to head the organization. The newly elected leaders, Officer Frederick J Schultz, president and Officer James McD Ellis, secretary were the first to hold these offices.<sup>xi</sup>

The association decided to incorporate itself. On April 17, 1904 the association under the name of the Locust Club had begun. The Honorable Frank Lynch of Buffalo, a member of the Erie County Assembly filed the necessary paperwork in Albany to incorporate the Locust Club.<sup>xii</sup> The name "Locust Club" was derived from locust wood, the material used for officer's nightsticks.

Monthly meetings of the Locust Club started on December 6, 1906. In the early years of the Locust Club, the club addressed several issues. Many of the issues involved department policies pertaining to uniforms, salaries and securing more time off. The club also addressed an operational policy that required officers to respond to fires in or out of their assigned precincts. Club officers and city officials would debate operational issues. If an agreement could not be met, club officials would hire an attorney to plead their case.<sup>xiii</sup> Club officials also used the print media to promote their cause and to bring issues to the attention of city officials.<sup>xiv</sup> One important issue discussed by club members was

to establish an honorary membership list in order to include superior officers as members.<sup>xv</sup>

In the beginning, to avoid suborning the constitution, department officials were prevented from becoming members. The issue of having superior officers in the club, as honorary members, became a very important one. The Locust Club's views on targeted issues may have differed from the views of the Rochester Police Department. Some targeted issues that affected the well being of police officers, may have conflicted with the beliefs held by superior officers. Membership in the Locust Club was strictly limited to police officers. As stated in the Locust Club constitution and by-laws, "Membership be limited to patrolmen as to accomplish the goals the club had hoped for". This clause in the constitution had caused great opposition at the time of inception.<sup>xvi</sup> This policy would be crucial, allowing superior officers and officials into the club might have intimidated members to be less than forthright about issues at hand. The dominating positions held by department officials and supervisors could be used to dominate club business. Because of these reasons, superior officers and officials were not members of the club. The policy had caused resentment by some officials who were ineligible for membership.<sup>xvii</sup>

Eventually, the club did establish an honorary list to allow superior officers and official's membership. The number of honorary members would equal the number of card-carrying Locust Club members. An honorary member of the club had no voting privileges, only patrolmen within the club could vote.<sup>xviii</sup>

An honorary membership in the Locust Club was just as exclusive as an actual membership.<sup>xix</sup> On August 6, 1908 the club joined the New York State Patrolmen's

Association.<sup>xx</sup> This affiliation made a membership in the Locust Club very desirable to certain officials.<sup>xxi</sup> Police officers and detectives of the club had the exclusive right to vote on honorary members. Major considerations when voting on someone for honorary membership were “is he a right guy and is he a friend of the coppers” (“coppers”, being a name likened by the police of the time).<sup>xxii</sup> Some political higher ups and their friends had been politely turned down for membership with regrets.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Since superior officers in the Locust Club had no voting privileges, once an officer or detective received a promotion he lost his voting rights. However, the promoted member would retain his membership in the club.

The Locust Club had other groups that acted as a separate unit from the club for the convenience of its members. The Rosewood Club, which is still in existence today, functioned harmoniously as a small group of members within the Locust Club that had no control over the parent club.<sup>xxiv</sup> The Rosewood Club consisted of superior officers within the Rochester Police Department ranging in rank from Sergeant to Chief. The name Rosewood Club came from the wood used in making the nightsticks of superior officers. Other groups operating within the Locust Club were the Women's Auxiliary, The Police Post, The American Legion and The Rochester Veteran Police Officers.<sup>xxv</sup> These groups were all housed within the Locust Club.

At a monthly meeting on March 24, 1921, a club member made a motion regarding the purchase of property.<sup>xxvi</sup> The property would be utilized to house the growing Locust Club. A house at the corner of Spring St. and Washington St. was found.

The house and property at 111 Spring St. had been erected in 1830 by Thomas Hart Rochester.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Thomas Hart Rochester was the third son of Nathaniel Rochester for whom the city is named. After the death of Thomas Hart Rochester, Mary Bliss used the house as a school for girls.<sup>xxviii</sup> In 1892 Mr. & Mrs. Charles Potter bought the house and resided there until 1907.

The house, built on the historic site of Indian Springs, became the home of the Locust Club in April 1921.<sup>xxix</sup> The months following the purchase were active for the Locust Club. Voting took place to approve funds for the clubhouse.<sup>xxx</sup> Motions for the purchase of paint and other articles to decorate the house were made; other motions included purchasing pool tables and suitable furniture for the home.<sup>xxxi</sup>

The club gave president George Fordham (1915-1923), living quarters and appointed him caretaker of the home.<sup>xxxii</sup> The Locust Club held an "Open House" to celebrate their new home on August 4, 1921. The visitors to the house included George Aldrich, Mayor Hiram Edgerton, William K Gillette, Special County Court Judge Andrew Hamilton, Police Chief Joseph Quigley, republican candidate for mayor George C Donohue, District Attorney Charles T Chapin, Charles S Owen and the commissioners of public works and parks. Furniture donations were made by prominent members of society such as Mr. & Mrs. Carl F Lomb, a piano gift from Mrs. Warham Whitney and game room equipment provided by James Gleason. Mrs. Hattie Strong and Edward Baush provided porch furnishings. Small brass plaques acknowledging the donor marked all items.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

An orchestra played. The garden was lit by Japanese lanterns and adorned with flowers and baskets provided by well-wishers.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The visitors to the clubhouse toured the 22-room mansion, remodeled into 7 large rooms to accommodate the club. The rear

of the home included caretaker quarters. The remodeling did not affect the architectural features of the Old Third Ward mansion. Visitors viewed the massive stairway, the hand carved, built-in sideboards, and the huge butler pantry. Mosaics of William Shakespeare's plays surrounded one grand fireplace.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Beginning with its impressive opening, the Locust Club's house was a grand place for its members. The house was a great place to hold meetings but had also become a place where officers could socialize freely with one another. Members would be welcomed to play cards, shoot pool or just unwind; the house belonged to them.<sup>xxxvi</sup> One committee that met regularly at the house was the midnight show committee.

The Locust club, in cooperation with various theaters throughout the city, produced midnight shows. These shows included motion pictures, professional vaudeville performers, dancers and comedians. The proceeds from the shows went into the general police welfare fund, which supported the charitable enterprises of the police department throughout the year.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The Locust Club stopped sponsoring the midnight shows sometime before 1940.<sup>xxxviii</sup> By the 1940's the club had established itself and was functioning without many changes. By the 1960's the by-laws of the club, unchanged since 1943, were in need of updating.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The 1960's were a turbulent time for the Locust Club and for the city of Rochester as a whole. In 1960 the club was 53 years old and well established. However, some problems that had lingered through the years remained: Police officers in the city were working 56 hours a week and had no paid holidays; a new clubhouse was being considered; and updating the by-laws and the honorary membership system were considered.<sup>xl</sup>

President Raymond J Hubbard (1960-1962) addressed the issue of the 56-hour workweek and, most importantly, the honorary card system. The Locust club lobbied Albany on behalf of its members to reduce work hours to 40 hours per week.<sup>xlii</sup> The club won and, in 1962, members of the Rochester Police Department began to work a 40-hour work week.<sup>xliii</sup> An inventory of the honorary card system was performed. Honorary cards had been issued to many people over the years and some had fallen into the hands of people not deserving its honor. The accounting caused some cards to be revoked.

Hubbard's successor in 1963 was Daniel J Murphy. Murphy remained president until 1966 and was the last to preside over a social club.<sup>xliiii</sup> During Murphy's tenure as president, major changes had begun to take place for the club. The first change occurred on December 31, 1964. On this day the city administration recognized the Locust Club as the official bargaining agent for the Rochester Police Department. As one of his last public acts, Mayor Gillette recognized a need for the police to have an orderly method to set forward their proposals.<sup>xliiv</sup> This established the Locust Club as the union for the city police; it was then one of the few unions in the nation to represent police officers. The Locust Club would also represent sergeants and lieutenants, now considered active members of the club.<sup>xliv</sup>

The club from this point forward would bargain for wages, hours and working conditions. Matters pertaining to discipline established by state or local law, or as defined by the rules and regulations of the commissioner of public safety, the police chief and the local Civil Service Commission were excluded. This was apparently designed to circumvent a demand made by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal

Employees, which sought to transfer discharge and disciplinary authority from the city manager to a grievance committee.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Around this time the Taylor Law had come into effect in New York State. This law made it possible for police to unionize. The Taylor Law also protects the public from labor actions by police. The Taylor Law makes it illegal for police unions to organize strikes or work slow downs.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Another change taking place in the 1960's was a change in address. The cost of maintaining the 1830 mansion had become extremely expensive. The building required \$3,000 annually for maintenance and heating.<sup>xlviii</sup> It also required costly repairs such as broken walls and a leaky roof.<sup>xlix</sup>

On May 7, 1964 the Locust Club met for the last time in the clubhouse at 111 Spring Street. The club had tried to sell the house for four years, but failed. Members decided that the house was not worth repairing and that the time had come to relocate. The interim clubhouse was the Ukrainian Civic Center at 831 Joseph Ave. Furnishings and other club items from Spring St. were sold at auction with members being first to bid. The old clubhouse was torn down that summer. The location is now a parking lot near the Interstate 490 off ramp for Plymouth Ave.

Between July 24 and July 27, 1964 race riots occurred in Rochester. The city's police force was praised by public safety commissioner Donald J. Corbett for their performance during the riots. In August of that year the city police accepted an agreement with the city. The agreement made the Rochester Police Department the 9th highest paid police department in the country. This agreement also included extra holidays and an increase of city contributions to the State Retirement System.<sup>1</sup> This was

the first labor agreement settled by the newly recognized Locust Club. Timing couldn't have been better. The Locust Club brought an agreement to its members that would be unanimously approved.<sup>li</sup>

In March 1965 the Locust Club again changed its address. They left their temporary clubhouse at the Ukrainian Civic Center and purchased a building at 1101 Norton St. The club occupied this building for the next 17 months. The club eventually sold this location finding it too spacious for their needs.<sup>lii</sup> The Ukrainian American West Side Club bought the building for \$59,000 on October 11, 1967.<sup>liii</sup> The club's search for more compact quarters would continue for years. Club records were temporarily stored in various places including a space at the Public Safety building. Club meetings continued at the VFW hall.

The Locust Club today operates as a union, not solely as a social club. Today's membership benefits are protection from unfair labor practices and secure wages and benefits. The club supports its members during difficult times, providing legal advice for officer's accused of actions in the performance of their duties. It also supplies representation at departmental disciplinary hearings.

The club's structure today includes a finance committee and an executive board. The function of these committees is to approve budgets and spending. The general membership of the club no longer votes on all the club's affairs. The elected representatives on the executive board, finance committee and elected officers, including the president, confer on most decisions. However, decision's regarding legal fees and ratification of contracts are brought to the general membership.<sup>liv</sup>

In closing, the club has changed over the years in structure and title. Society's attitude toward police officers has changed since 1904. The Locust Club's mission, "to promote the social, physical welfare and material improvements of its members" remains.<sup>iv</sup> Today, a social club cannot provide the club's original mission only a strong union can. "The police protect people. The Locust Club protects the police".<sup>lvi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> "Off Duty With the Officers," Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 10 September 1939, Sunday Magazine, p.5.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> Peck, William F., History of the Police Department of Rochester, NY, (Rochester New York: Police Benevolent Association, 1903), p. 167.

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid. p.196

<sup>vi</sup> Moss, Albert, History of the Police Bureau, Rochester, NY, (Rochester New York: Locust Club, 1929), p. 44.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>x</sup> Moss, Albert, History of the Police Bureau, Rochester, NY, (Rochester New York: Locust Club, 1929), p.42.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid. p.44

<sup>xiii</sup> Moss, Albert, History of the Police Bureau, Rochester, NY, (Rochester New York: Locust Club, 1929), p.44.

<sup>xiv</sup> Interview with Raymond J Hubbard, Police Detective, retired President of the Locust Club 1960-62., 1 December 1998.

<sup>xv</sup> Locust Club, Records of Minutes from Monthly Meetings, (Rochester New York, 1906-1908).

<sup>xvi</sup> Moss, Albert, History of the Police Bureau, Rochester, NY, (Rochester New York: Locust Club, 1929), p.42

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid

<sup>xviii</sup> "Off Duty With the Officers," Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 10 September 1939, Sunday Magazine, p.5.

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<sup>xix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xx</sup> Locust Club, Records of Minutes from Monthly Meetings, (Rochester New York, 1908).

<sup>xxi</sup> “Off Duty With the Officers,” Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 10 September 1939, Sunday Magazine, p.5.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxv</sup> “Off Duty With the Officers,” Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 10 September 1939, Sunday Magazine, p.5.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Locust Club, Records of Minutes from Monthly Meetings, (Rochester New York, March 24, 1921).

<sup>xxvii</sup> “Off Duty With the Officers,” Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 10 September 1939, Sunday Magazine, p.5.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid

<sup>xxix</sup> Ibid

<sup>xxx</sup> Locust Club, Records of Minutes from Monthly Meetings, (Rochester New York, April 12 and May 31, 1921).

<sup>xxxi</sup> Ibid., (April 26 & May 31, 1921).

<sup>xxxii</sup> Ibid., (May 31, 1921).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> “Prominent Men Visit New Home of Club”, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 8 August 1921, p.17.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxv</sup> “Off Duty With the Officers,” Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 10 Sept

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Interview with Raymond J Hubbard, Police Detective, retired President of the Locust Club 1960-62., 1 December 1998.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> “12,000 Attend Locust Club’s Benefit Show”, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 7 February 1937, p.5b.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Interview with Raymond J Hubbard, Police Detective, retired President of the Locust Club 1960-62., 1 December 1998.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Ibid

<sup>xl</sup> Pledge of Performance, Election Campaign Pamphlet (Hubbard, Raymond, J. Police Detective, retired President of the Locust Club 1960-62. Rochester, New York, 16

<sup>xli</sup> Interview with Raymond J Hubbard, Police Detective, retired President of the Locust Club 1960-62., 1 December 1998.

<sup>xlii</sup> Interview with Raymond J Hubbard, Police Detective, retired President of the Locust Club 1960-62., 1 December 1998.

<sup>xliii</sup> Hirshman, Raymond, F. Police Detective retired, Personal Scrapbook, 1929-1970, Rochester Police Department Archives.

<sup>xliv</sup> “City Recognizes Locust Club”, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 1 January 1964

<sup>xlvi</sup> Ibid

<sup>xlvi</sup> Ibid

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<sup>xlvii</sup> Interview with Ronald Evangelista, Police Detective, Current President of the Locust Club, 3 December 1998.

<sup>xlviii</sup> “Locust Club to be Homeless”,

<sup>xlix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1</sup> “Police Accept Raise; \$1,022 Over 2 Years”, Rochester Times-Union, 6 August 1964, p.1b, p3b.

<sup>li</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lii</sup> “Police Locust Club Seeking New Headquarters Site”, Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 12 October 1967, p. col.

<sup>liii</sup> Ibid

<sup>liv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lv</sup> “Off Duty With the Officers,” Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, 10 September 1939, Sunday Magazine, p.5.

<sup>lvi</sup> Locust Club Slogan, Rochester New York

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