



Vermont Milk Chocolate Company Factory: A Bittersweet History

Burlington learned some hard lessons a century ago as Progressive-era optimism collapsed amidst unforeseen challenges wrought by misfortune, war, disease, and global trade chaos.

By THOMAS DURANT VISSER

Drawn by temptations of sweet profits derived from producing tasty treats, over a hundred Burlington business leaders gathered on February 2, 1917, in the glimmering rooftop restaurant of the Hotel Vermont to hear about an investment opportunity to build a major new milk chocolate manufacturing facility in Vermont's largest city.¹ While some may have seen dire warnings on the horizon, the magnificent views of Lake Champlain and the city's industrial, commercial, and residential landscape offered unignorable reminders of Burlington's fortunate assets of geography and history. And so, a poignant story was about to unfold with shocking twists and hard lessons that few of the potential investors and progressive civic leaders could have imaged.

BIG PLANS FOR BURLINGTON

William T. Scofield, president of the Burlington Merchants Association called the Friday afternoon meeting to order and introduced Fred H. Roberts, the founder and president of the Massachusetts Chocolate

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Company, one of the largest producers of chocolate in the United States.² Mr. Roberts then introduced John Walker, the ambitious general manager of the Massachusetts Chocolate Company, who had joined the Boston firm three years earlier.³

John Walker presented a carefully worded statement to the assembled group that outlined a complex business plan to form a new corporation named the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company that would be a subsidiary of the Massachusetts Chocolate Company. This new concern would be established by issuing both preferred stock and common stock. Of the \$300,000 worth of preferred stock, \$200,000 would be available to Burlington investors, and the Massachusetts company would hold \$100,000. The Massachusetts firm would also hold \$200,000 of common stock in the new firm. Thus, by having a majority of the total shares, the Massachusetts Chocolate Company would maintain control of the new venture. Also, rather than owning a new factory in Burlington, the property and equipment would be leased to the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company by a new real estate trust entity.⁴

Several well-respected local Burlington businessmen vouched for the complicated investment scheme. Burlington banker Charles P. Smith spoke positively about the Massachusetts Chocolate Company based on recommendations he had received from some Boston banker associates. One of Burlington's most distinguished business leaders, Smith was the president and chairman of the board of the Burlington Savings Bank.⁵

John J. Flynn, a prominent local real estate developer concurred, saying, "It is a good thing for Burlington and will help farmers of the county. I favor it strongly."⁶ Perhaps best remembered as the namesake of Burlington's Flynn Theater, John J. Flynn also served as vice president of the Chittenden Trust Company, vice president of the Burlington Traction Company streetcar line, and vice president of the Elias Lyman Coal Company.

The Burlington Merchants Association then elected a committee to negotiate a contract with the Massachusetts Chocolate Company. The plan was to bring managers from the Boston firm to run the new milk chocolate factory with up to two hundred local employees hired to work there within eight months.⁷

Perhaps to help foster local support, the *Burlington Free Press* soon reported that the Massachusetts Chocolate Company shipped two tons of its "Waneta" brand chocolate to Burlington's Crystal Confectionery Company to be "distributed among the retail merchants for sale on their arrival."⁸ Located in a large factory at the corner of College and Pine streets, the Crystal Confectionery Company had been producing a wide variety of candies for decades that it distributed nationally. Its

manager M. J. Barnes, a former city alderman, had initiated the contacts on behalf of the Burlington Merchants Association to encourage the Massachusetts firm to start a new chocolate manufacturing facility in Burlington.⁹

ROYAL WELCOME

On February 27, 1917, John Walker and Fred H. Roberts secured an option on a fifteen-acre site in Burlington's South End.¹⁰ Within a week, local investors eagerly scrambled to acquire over \$150,000 of the stock in the new Vermont Milk Chocolate Company. Subscribers in this new venture were some of Burlington's most prominent businessmen, including: M. J. Barnes of the Crystal Confectionery Company; Charles P. Smith, the banker who had spoken at the introductory meeting; and John J. Flynn, the landowner of the fifteen-acre plat proposed



*Vermont Milk Chocolate Co. factory construction plans blueprint, February 1917.
Courtesy of University of Vermont Special Collections.*

for the new chocolate factory site located next to the Rutland Railroad tracks on Park Avenue, later renamed Flynn Avenue in his honor.¹¹

On March 22, 1917, the chocolate company's plans were shared with the Burlington Merchants Association and Chamber of Commerce when over two hundred people attended a festive banquet held in the main dining room of the Hotel Vermont.¹² After receiving a "royal welcome" at

the dinner event, John Walker, the newly designated president of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, confirmed that the first part of the new factory would be built on the South End property by the lowest bidder, one of Burlington's leading contractors, James E. Cashman.¹³

According to the *Burlington Daily News*: "J. E. Cashman, who last night was awarded the contract for the construction of the building... already has about 200,000 bricks on the scene. The bricks are those taken from the old railroad station, which is being torn down."¹⁴ Cashman was also an initial investor in the new Vermont Milk Chocolate Company. His \$85,979 bid for constructing the factory was just \$133 under that of the next lowest bidder, the Kieslich Construction Company of Burlington.¹⁵

John Walker's announcement provided some information about how the new chocolate factory would be built:

The building will not be of a strictly fireproof construction, being of what is known to the trade as the slow burning. Hard pine will be used for the timbers and the building will have a 12 inch brick curtain wall with two feet pilasters. The building will have a frontage of 73 feet and a depth of 150 feet. One half of this will be three stories in height and of the other half a small part will be two stories high with the remainder one story.¹⁶

Walker also announced at the banquet that a huge supply of cocoa beans that they had just purchased for nearly a million dollars would be shipped by rail in the coming five months to the new factory.¹⁷ Globally, cocoa bean supplies and prices were in flux due to the First World War and concerns were being raised over how workers on cocoa bean plantations were being treated, especially on Portugal's São Tomé Island colony off the west coast of Africa. Although slavery had been abolished there in 1869, the working conditions for the African contract cocoa bean plantation workers on São Tomé Island were reported to be dire. This received worldwide attention in 1906 when an exposé by Henry Nevison published by *Harper's* asked whether such "contract labor" could be considered "periodical slavery." Although this prompted a boycott of São Tomé cocoa beans by British chocolate manufacturers, American firms took advantage of the reduced wholesale cocoa bean prices and São Tomé Island soon became the world's largest exporter of cocoa beans.¹⁸

Even as the *Burlington Free Press* screamed "Germany Unleashes Her Submarines For Unrestricted Warfare Aimed to Force England into Starvation," local investors and politicians yearned for fresh business opportunities while the United States Congress stuck to President Woodrow Wilson's neutrality foreign policy as World War I raged in Europe.¹⁹

MUNICIPAL SUPPORT

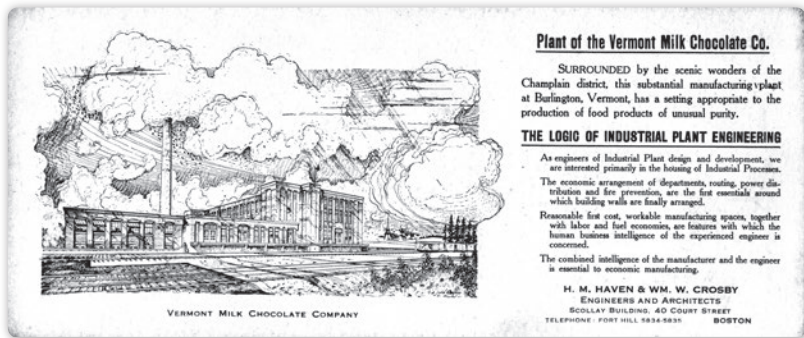
On March 31, 1917, Burlington voters overwhelmingly approved granting a ten-year tax exemption for buildings, fixtures, and property of the new chocolate company. This resolution noted that an association called the "Burlington Realty Trust," formed by John J. Flynn, Fred H. Roberts, and John Walker, had purchased property in Burlington for the erection of buildings that would be leased to the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company for its exclusive use. The city resolution also mandated that at least \$125,000 be invested in constructing at least one building for this new business in 1917.²⁰

Less than a week later, President Wilson formally signed a resolution of Congress declaring war against Germany.²¹ Despite tensions over America's declaration of war and ongoing political debates over Prohibition and women's suffrage, many in Burlington were still optimistic about the local economy during the spring of that tumultuous year. Real estate demand in Burlington's South End was very strong, especially for smaller homes in the new subdivisions near the new chocolate factory under construction.²²

In June 1917, William T. Scofield, the president of the Burlington Merchants' Association, who now also served as treasurer of the new Vermont Milk Chocolate Company told the *Burlington Daily News* that the business potential for the "chocolate business is unusually rosy."²³ The company received a huge order for chocolate from the United States Navy and their Boston plant was so overwhelmed that it would extend shifts. Nevertheless, construction work on the new Burlington chocolate factory was lagging due to a shortage of construction workers.²⁴ More news of unexpected challenges came in July 1917 with a statement that the launch of manufacturing operations probably would be delayed. According to the *Burlington Daily News*:

Solid rock at one corner and heavy clay at the other extreme were some of the difficulties experienced by James E. Cashman when he began to excavate some months ago for the foundations of the new chocolate factory on Park avenue... Thousands of bricks which Mr. Cashman saved in tearing down the walls of the old railroad station on College street are used to build the walls, with new brick as facing.²⁵

By July 25, the factory foundations had been successfully installed under the supervision of the Haven & Crosby engineering firm of Boston.²⁶ The engineers' goals for the new factory were summarized on their business card (below) that emphasized how the "logic of industrial engineering" served as the primary factor for determining the design for "workable manufacturing spaces" produced at "reasonable cost."²⁷



Haven & Crosby business card with rendering of Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, 1917. Courtesy of Alfred Holden.

Meanwhile due to the declaration of war with Germany, over six hundred thousand American men would be needed to join into the military.²⁸ Many men from Burlington and beyond soon responded to this call to serve their country, further squeezing the labor market.

Late in August 1917, the Kieslich Construction Company replaced J. E. Cashman's company on the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company project.²⁹ Soon the Kieslich firm posted advertisements in Burlington and Rutland newspapers seeking to employ dozens of union carpenters for the factory construction project.³⁰

Noted for the engineering and construction of many of Burlington's most important office, industrial, and civic buildings of the era, the Kieslich Construction Company had been founded in 1915 by Albert Kieslich, an engineer with experience in construction, and Oscar Heininger, a former superintendent at the Burlington Water Department. Alfred Heininger, who had previously worked for the Boston Edison Illuminating Company, joined the Kieslich Construction Company several years later and served as the firm's lawyer, secretary, and treasurer.³¹

On November 7, 1917, despite setbacks attributed to "bad weather," Burlington's new chocolate factory was said to be ready to start production within two weeks or as soon as hydroelectric power could be supplied by the Burlington Light & Power Company on a line of high voltage wires running from its power plant at the Winooski River Gorge. After considerable debate, the Burlington Board of Aldermen conditionally allowed the new factory to use hydroelectric power produced by the outside company, rather than relying on electricity generated from Burlington's outdated municipal coal-fired plant.³²

Although the work of installing the manufacturing equipment for

grinding cocoa beans and manufacturing cocoa and chocolate products was nearly finished at the new factory and the raw materials had arrived for production, the electrical powerlines from the hydroelectric plant still had not been connected by December 20. John Walker said that he expected that the new factory would be running by the beginning of January and that the company's goal was to have between two and three hundred employees working at the plant in about a month. As many workers as possible would be hired locally, but some supervisors would be brought in from Boston for training and management.³³

The *Burlington Weekly Free Press* noted in a year-in-review article that despite elevated labor and materials costs during 1917, construction of residential and business structures was booming in Burlington. It observed that the new chocolate factory was the largest construction project underway in Burlington and "about the biggest building operation in the State."³⁴

Another article acknowledged how the shift to using hydropower by the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company represented a positive move to support the future of industry in Vermont, especially considering the severe coal shortages in New England during the abnormally cold weather of 1917–1918.³⁵

This provides strong evidence of the historic significance of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company factory in Burlington. Not only was it one of the most technically innovative manufacturing facilities of its era in Vermont, it was on course to become one of the state's largest employers and a business of global importance. Its development would also serve as a catalyst for advancing a range of progressive initiatives for the city of Burlington.

STRONG LAUNCH

The year 1918 started especially well for the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, with a million-dollar order received through the Massachusetts Chocolate Company to produce nearly two and a half million pounds of their Norfolk sweet chocolates and over three hundred thousand pounds of their Wan-eta brand sweet chocolates to be exported abroad through the New York-based Dominion Trading Company.³⁶

By mid-January 1918, John Walker announced that manufacturing was well underway at the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, with twenty-five thousand pounds of cocoa butter and breakfast cocoa already produced. He also noted that they had another order on hand for forty thousand pounds of chocolate flavoring for a New York biscuit company, and that within four months they expected to be making *seventy-five tons* of chocolate a day!³⁷

Within two weeks, two more huge orders arrived, this time from the Belgian Relief Commission to assist with feeding millions of starving inhabitants of Belgium, which had been occupied by German military forces since 1914. The large orders for the company's Wan-eta sweet chocolate bars were to be shipped by rail to New York by November 19, 1918, where they would be loaded onto relief ships bound for the war-ravaged country.³⁸

To respond to their flood of orders, the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company published classified advertisements in local newspapers in early February seeking twenty-five male factory workers and "25 Girls for wrapping and packing department."³⁹

At a special meeting held on February 26, 1918, shareholders of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company voted to acquire the Burlington factory property from the Burlington Realty Trust for \$250,000 and to double the amount of stock issued from five hundred thousand dollars to one million dollars.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, accusations about ground glass being found in the Massachusetts Chocolate Company's Wan-eta brand of chocolate candy sold to soldiers at Camp Dix, the US Army base in Wrightstown, New Jersey, were widely reported in American newspapers in February 1918. John Walker immediately dispatched his recently married son-in-law lawyer, Ernest A. Linderholm, to New Jersey to investigate the "murder plot" rumor. Mr. Walker then issued the following statement:

A report in the morning papers, coming from Camp Dix has played us in a wrong light with the general public and will cause us a large money loss. The facts as represented we believe to be absolutely false and the findings unwarranted. We demand that there be a free and open investigation covering the whole matter.⁴¹

Within weeks, a federal War Department investigation determined that a few large particles of glass, perhaps accidentally inserted from a broken jar rather than ground glass, had been found by a soldier in one bar of the candy produced for the Massachusetts Chocolate Company. The suspect shipment of Wan-eta chocolate was removed, and recently-drafted soldiers were assured that they could resume eating the chocolate bars as the US Surgeon General found no evidence of a plot to poison the troops.⁴²

TRAGIC SETBACK

Tragedy struck on April 25, 1918, when a violent nighttime explosion rocked Burlington's new Vermont Milk Chocolate Company factory, which was soon engulfed in flames.

The following vivid description of the catastrophe was published the next day in the *Burlington Free Press*:

The fire, which has caused a loss of over \$2,000,000, started from an internal explosion, as far as could be ascertained last night, in the shipping room, which was located on the first floor of the small ell, which adjoined the main building of four stories... It was about ten minutes before ten o'clock when a deafening explosion, like the sound of a cannon, boomed through the room, the sound seeming to come from the elevator well. The flames seemed to shoot from the first story of the ell to the top story, where the business office of the concern were located, and down to the basement, where the cocoa cooling room was located. It went by way of the elevator and though there were fire proof doors leading to the floors they were not closed by the employes who had all they could do to save their lives... Soon the flames spread through the big factory from the ell and water did little or no good. There was too much inflammable material inside to fight it with water and it was soon seen that the building was doomed and that all efforts would be powerless. Six cars of finished product that had been packed ready for shipment to New York en route to Belgium, for the Belgian Relief Commission, for which the concern was filling a million dollar order, were saved by spectators who pushed them away from the west of the building before the wall fell in.⁴³



First Vermont Milk Chocolate Co. factory in ruins, April 1918. Postcard in author's collection.

This disastrous fire came as a shock to the city of Burlington as three workers were killed. It also was feared that about seven hundred employees at the new chocolate factory would be without work.⁴⁴

A funeral for David Upton, the watchman killed in the fire, was held on the following Monday evening at his home on Elmwood Avenue.⁴⁵ His only dependent, his mother, would later file an appeal of the work-

ers compensation settlement for wages and funeral expenses.⁴⁶ The other two workers lost in the fire were John Crowley, who lived on Monroe Street in Burlington's Old North End, and Perrault Companion, who resided in the nearby Lakeside neighborhood with his wife and his family of seven children ranging from two to fourteen years of age.⁴⁷

John Walker and Fred H. Roberts promptly arrived by train from their Boston company headquarters to announce that a new factory for the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company would be built as soon as possible on their Burlington site. At a Saturday afternoon event at the New Sherwood Hotel sponsored by the Burlington Merchants Association, Burlington Judge Charles H. Darling pledged that the city would do whatever it could legally do to assist with the reconstruction of the chocolate factory. Mr. Walker received a strong ovation from the group, and he assured everyone that investments in the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company were strong. Mr. Roberts also spoke on behalf of the board of directors and declared that chocolate business prospects were so strong that the replacement factory in Burlington would be even larger than the one that just had been lost to the fire.⁴⁸

By the end of May 1918, the insurance adjusters had reviewed the situation and work was underway removing the fire-charred factory ruins. Some of the foundations and the power plant section of the building complex had apparently survived well enough to be reused.⁴⁹

A South Boston demolition firm was immediately hired to complete the needed cleanup of the gruesome site within thirty working days.⁵⁰ It soon became clear that the task ahead would be more daunting than anticipated, as the factory demolition was complicated by knots of mangled steel mixed with heaps of charred building debris. There also were huge mounds of ruined chocolate that had to be removed from the site before rebuilding could begin. Furthermore, the economic context for rebuilding the chocolate factory had changed dramatically due to a sudden surge in inflation and acute shortages of construction materials, equipment, and labor due to the national war effort.⁵¹

REPLACEMENT FACTORY

New plans for the replacement factory were immediately drawn by the Haven & Crosby engineering firm that had designed the earlier structures. This time they separated manufacturing and shipping functions into two separate buildings to help reduce fire risks. Rather than four stories, the new factory would be just two stories high.⁵²

Within days the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company purchased a thirty-five-year-old factory in downtown Burlington located by the waterfront at the northeast corner of Main Street and Battery Street. The

former Champlain Manufacturing Company mill had been used for manufacturing wooden boxes, architectural trim, and furniture under the direction of local industrialist W. J. Van Patten. Most recently, the factory had been leased to the Hickok Lumber company for making wooden ammunition boxes for the war effort.⁵³ But rather than reusing the former Champlain Manufacturing Company box mill, workers swiftly disassembled it for materials to rebuild the Vermont Milk Chocolate company factory.⁵⁴

Some estimated that a year would be needed for completing the rebuilding; however on June 22, 1918, John Walker announced that they had accepted a one-and-a-half million-dollar contract order from the Belgian government to produce four and a half tons of chocolate. This would include their Waneta brand of milk chocolate, plain chocolate, and cocoa for cooking to be shipped by the end of September 1918. Many of the Burlington factory employees and managers were still being paid so that production could resume as promptly as possible. Fortunately, much of the supply of cocoa beans in railroad boxcars had been saved from being lost in the fire and more supply was arriving by rail.⁵⁵

To accomplish this herculean task of meeting the Belgian contract, two large motor trucks were dispatched from Boston to retrieve some of the critical chocolate manufacturing machinery for repairs and for immediate reuse at the Massachusetts Chocolate Company plant.⁵⁶

John Walker also announced that the Kieslich Construction Company had been hired to build the new chocolate factory on the same site as before. His very ambitious goal was to be producing chocolate there again by August 15.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, by early July 1918, over a million drafted and enlisted American soldiers, including many from Burlington, had been shipped to France to fight in the Great War as German U-boats stalked shipping lanes near New York and along East Coast.⁵⁸

To help cut costs and to speed rebuilding, sections of the new factory were built on the surviving Vermont Milk Chocolate Company foundations using construction materials salvaged from the demolition of the Champlain box factory. Even the office building next to the Champlain shops was taken down so that its hardwood finish could be re-used in the new chocolate factory. Machinery salvaged from the ruins of chocolate factory was also being repaired locally for the new operation.⁵⁹

By the last week of July, about a hundred tons of steel girders had arrived and replacement brick walls and floor planks were being laid. In addition to constructing the one-story replacement building on the remaining chocolate factory foundation, another new building was con-

structed nearby with much of the framing timber also recycled from the old Champlain box factory.⁶⁰

But as soon as construction of the replacement factory had commenced, questions were being raised about the adequacy of the city's water supply for its fire protection. By early August, Burlington's city government received a report from a committee appointed to investigate whether fire protection was adequate in the area near the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company. They determined that the city's original water mains connected to the burned-out factory had been too small, which may have contributed to an insufficient water flow, and thus perhaps the inability to quell the April blaze.⁶¹

INFLUENZA

On August 6, 1918, yet another ominous challenge was reported in the local news—crew members on a Standard Oil steamer delivering gasoline to Burlington via Lake Champlain had been removed from the vessel due to the dreaded “Spanish influenza.”⁶²

By October 1918, the influenza epidemic swept swiftly across military and civilian populations in the United States with thousands of deaths reported.⁶³ Soon, so many people contracted the disease in Burlington that the Ethan Allen Club house on College Street was converted into a temporary hospital.⁶⁴

Among those immediately stricken by the illness were Vermont Milk Chocolate Company president John Walker and his twenty-year-old son, Byron L. Walker. Both received care at the Green Mountain Sanitarium on 244 Pearl Street in Burlington for several days in October before returning by train to their homes in Massachusetts.⁶⁵

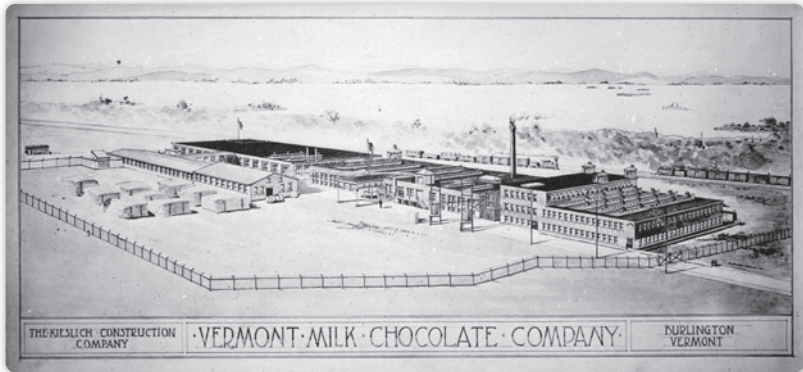
But after a weekend break, John Walker was back in Burlington to announce that the new chocolate factory would resume production within a week and that it would be running fully by the start of 1919. He also announced that the firm had just obtained more large chocolate contracts from the governments of France and Belgium, as well as from the Belgian Relief Commission.⁶⁶

Although the influenza epidemic was “getting better every day” elsewhere in Vermont, in late October 1918, Burlington's Fanny Allen Hospital was “crowded to capacity” and there were sixty patients at an emergency hospital set up in the high school on Main Street. Meanwhile in Burlington so many families were affected that many homes were left abandoned with all family members hospitalized.⁶⁷

Because of the number of construction workers unable to work due to the illness, the pace of finishing the Vermont Milk Chocolate Com-

pany factory was further delayed, as were plans to increase the amount of chocolate being made there by adding more shifts.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, on November 7, 1918, optimism returned, as the *Burlington Free Press* reported:

The Vermont Milk Chocolate factory is now in operation and within the space of five months, when the work began of cleaning out the tangled mass of ruins, which resulted from the fire that destroyed the first plant, moulded chocolate is being turned out in good big quantities. The night shift will probably be put to work at once and the amount of finished product will be somewhere near to where it was before the fire.⁶⁹



Second Vermont Milk Chocolate Company factory. Kieslich Construction Company rendering of bird's-eye view looking southwest, circa 1919. Courtesy of Alfred Holden.

MUNICIPAL CONCESSIONS

Although the Burlington Water Department had worked to improve the volume and pressure of water delivered to the rebuilt Vermont Milk Chocolate factory, insurance companies and city fire commissioners demanded that tests be conducted to demonstrate that the capacity of the water system and hydrants would be sufficient to serve the fire protection needs.⁷⁰

In a presentation to the Burlington Board of Aldermen in early November, Vermont Milk Chocolate Company president John Walker stated that without an increased water supply, it would be “absolutely impossible for us to do business without adequate insurance.” To address these concerns, the board unanimously approved allocating funds to lay over three thousand feet of a new twelve-inch cast-iron water pipe south along Pine Street from Lakeside Avenue to Park Avenue (now Flynn Avenue) to serve the chocolate factory and nearby establishments and neighborhoods. Due to the chocolate company’s recent

orders to support the national war effort, the cast-iron pipes were acquired and delivered in two weeks. Within three weeks, city-funded work had begun to dig the long ditch for the new water line.⁷¹

Local optimism surged further with news of the signing of the armistice with Germany on November 11, 1918, celebrated by a grand “victory parade” through downtown Burlington and by communities across the country.⁷²

Within days, the *Burlington Free Press* featured an article headlined “Burlington Manufacturers Expect Prosperity for Many Years and Are Not Worrying about Any Reaction Following the End of the War” that included the following:

President John Walker of the Vermont Chocolate factory cannot see any let-up in his business for years to come and has tangible evidence to prove it. He is of the opinion that prosperity will be unparalleled throughout the country. Without an effort of any kind the factory can be kept at full speed for two years and probably for a good while longer as there is a constant renewal of orders.⁷³

The article acknowledged serious hardships endured by other Burlington manufacturers during the war, a context that may have indirectly accounted for some of the capitalistic enthusiasm that had supported the new local chocolate company.⁷⁴

PERSEVERANCE

Ambitious business opportunities beckoned the Boston-based parent firm, the F. H. Roberts Company, to expand its operations by building another factory in Cleveland, Ohio, to produce its “Apollo” line of chocolates, as well as constructing a new plant in New York City for its “Miller Made” chocolates. Their plan announced in February 1919 was to use the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company factory in Burlington, which was by then operating at full capacity, to produce chocolate coatings for all these other products within about six months.⁷⁵

Coinciding with this news, the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company took out large advertisements in local newspapers on February 12, 1919, to announce that despite difficulties, the previous year had been successful and they would expand their Vermont operations with more new buildings. They also noted that while 60 percent of the preferred stock was held by the company’s management, the remaining 40 percent was held mainly by about two hundred people in Burlington and vicinity. The ad included an offer to sell \$100,000 more of preferred stock on top of the \$446,000 of preferred stock already issued by the firm.⁷⁶

The annual shareholders meeting of the company held in February 1919 elected Fred H. Roberts, John Walker, John J. Flynn, M. J. Barnes,

William H. Cole, Clarence P. Johnson, Everett H. Buck, and William Scofield to the firm's board of directors. This board then elected Fred H. Roberts to be its chairman and John Walker as president.⁷⁷

In March 1919, John Walker, along with his son Byron and his son's new wife, Helen, obtained passports to travel to Cuba to discuss importing sugar and cocoa beans.⁷⁸ The negotiations apparently went well, for on return from this business trip, John Walker announced in mid-April that a half-million-dollar investment by the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company would soon be made for more construction work to expand the chocolate works in Burlington. This would involve the erection of a brick-and-cement building measuring 150 by 164 feet located north of their existing factory. This new structure would be equipped with new machinery for manufacturing milk chocolate. The announcement also noted that the two new accessory buildings under construction east of the main factory would be used for printing and embossing labels for the chocolate wrappers and as a machine shop.⁷⁹

With a bold front-page headline, the *Burlington Daily News* proclaimed, "NEW INDUSTRY HERE TO EMPLOY 500 PERSONS—Burlington to Have Another Big Business Here in Near Future" on May 13, 1919. This story went on to explain that the new brick, steel, and concrete factory building, already under construction by the Kieslich Construction Company would instead be conveyed to the Miller Chocolate Company, which was allied with the F. H. Roberts Company, the parent firm of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company. George Miller was the president of the Miller Chocolate Company and John Walker served as its treasurer. Although the two companies would be sharing the same factory building, they would run as separate businesses, and George Miller would move to Burlington to serve as the president and general manager of his firm.⁸⁰

To accommodate the plan for the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company to expand its production capacity, these revised plans called for yet another new factory addition to be built on the existing site. In all, about a thousand people soon would be employed at the combined factory site in Burlington. Meanwhile, John Walker told the press that he had signed a contract with the Leroux Brothers wholesale company of Belgium for a huge order of chocolate and cocoa that would be conveyed immediately from their Burlington warehouse by a special train to New York for ocean shipment to Belgium. To further grow his ambitious business ventures, Walker also announced plans to expand his company around the world, stating that he would be leaving shortly for a tour of Europe with the goal of possibly establishing new chocolate factories in Belgium, France, and Italy in collaboration with William



Cox, head of the Cox Confectionery Company of Boston. John Walker also said his plan to go into partnership with Fred H. Roberts to establish a chocolate factory in China was “almost a certainty.”⁸¹

In response, the *Burlington Daily News* observed:

When Mr. Walker stepped into Burlington for the first time a little more than two years ago there was nothing of importance south of the Queen City Cotton mill and there was no indication that there would be any growth in that direction as all former attempts to develop that end of the city had failed. Within the past two years practically all of the building in the city has been in the section mentioned.⁸²

Plans for expanding the chocolate factory in Burlington moved ahead as the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company filed to issue over three thousand more shares of stock in June 1919.⁸³

A high point of Burlington’s Independence Day parade on July 4, 1919, was when samples of the Wan-eta chocolate were scattered into the crowds from the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company’s holiday float.⁸⁴ According to the *Burlington Free Press*:

Not only were the boys of the world war showered with floral tributes while they stood in line, but the girls in the float of the Vermont Milk Chocolate company threw broadcast among the heroes samples of their ware, which were eagerly grasped not only by the boys themselves, but by anybody who could get ahold of them. The float of the Milk Chocolate company was distinctive in its display of an Indian girl, “Waneta,” which is the name of a brand of chocolate manufactured by the company. The Indian maiden was surrounded on the float with a number of other maids, who were the dispensers of the sweet product. The inscription on the float was: ‘Waneta’ pleased them over there--it will please them over here.⁸⁵

UNREST AND DISILLUSIONMENT

Although the stock market was surging at the start of the summer of 1919, waves of economic uncertainty, social unrest, and labor troubles were brewing in the United States as consumer demand, price variations, and unemployment increased with the return of the troops after the armistice and as wartime trade restrictions were lifted.⁸⁶

Despite a barrage of positive news in the local press about the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, grumbles started to be voiced locally by the summer of 1919. One concerned a rumor that the vacant lot across from the new train station at the corner of Main Street and Battery Street where the chocolate company had demolished the Champlain Manufacturing Company mill would be given for use as a playground. Instead, John Walker said the company would allow the lot to be used temporarily as a public playground; but he denied any intention to donate the prime real estate to the city of Burlington.⁸⁷

The shortage of adequate housing was also a public concern in Burlington in 1919. This especially affected employees of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company. A sampling of Burlington city directories of the period shows that about half of both male and female workers of the company were listed as boarding in Burlington's neighborhoods.⁸⁸

These concerns about Burlington's housing shortage were discussed with John Walker in an interview with the *Burlington Free Press* on July 15, 1919. In response, Walker suggested that the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company would be ready to launch a business venture to help support the construction of a hundred new houses in Burlington. He went on to say:

There is no sound business reason why Burlington, if it shows proper spirit, should not be a model city and double the population in the next ten years. Not only double the population but treble the taxable property. To do this only two things are needed: good roads and high class houses. Everything else will take care of itself. Progressive ideas must be used from now on and must start immediately.⁸⁹

The *Burlington Daily News* interviewed Walker several days later and published an article headlined, "Burlington May Lose Big Business Concerns; Poor Housing Conditions" noting:

Burlington faces something akin to industrial disaster as a result of the present acuteness of the housing problem. Nowhere in the city are houses obtainable and the way to further industrial expansion is most effectively blocked.⁹⁰

Inspired by his recent travels to Europe where he had visited Belgium, France, and Scotland, Walker also observed:

I believe from observations in Europe that we are just now in the era of great prosperity in all lines of business. We, too, have our labor troubles and our unsettled conditions and will be more or less troubled until we find laws to fit the changed conditions, and we will find them, as our labor and our citizens are the most progressive in the world.⁹¹

The *Burlington Daily News* also published an editorial on the local housing issue, stating:

Burlington is squarely faced at this time by the definite need of a comprehensive plan of home building. Failing in this we face something akin to industrial disaster...

Just around the corner there is a big—vibrant city pulsating with life moving onward to high attainments—to turn that corner we must provide houses to accommodate the busy hands which will make the products destined to bring wealth and fame to this city. Never was the spirit of a city more sharply challenged. Are we to play the part of weaklings, to falter and fall or are we going to break down the artificial barrier erected by high prices and produce the homes which industry demands?⁹²

Ironically, on the same hot July day when John Walker spoke to the press with such optimism, serious difficulties abruptly hit the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company factory. Over a hundred women in the wrapping department abruptly walked out when they heard that their summer piecework pay raise would be reduced. A few stayed to work, however. Trouble broke out when the faithful workers stepped outside for lunch and an altercation ensued. The superintendent of the chocolate-wrapping department, Everett Buck, ordered his foreman assistant, Henry LaPointe, to quell the strikers, and in the chaos one of the women, Harriet Garvey, was injured. After losing consciousness, she was taken home by an ambulance.⁹³

Henry Lapointe, who lived at 189 North Champlain Street in Burlington, subsequently was arrested on a charge of breach of peace based on a complaint from Miss Garvey. He was released on bail after a preliminary hearing in city court.⁹⁴

The striking employees then demanded to meet with John Walker, vowing to quit if their pay raise was not restored.⁹⁵ Twenty male employees in the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company's shipping department then struck the next morning. On Thursday, July 24, 1919, a larger number declared that they also would strike unless they were granted an eight-hour workday and an increase of fifteen percent in wages. About three hundred workers met that evening in downtown Burlington to discuss forming a trade union associated with the American Federation of Labor.⁹⁶

President John Walker rushed back from Boston by train to Burlington and informed the press that the employment matter stemmed from a misunderstanding, as the previous pay raise had not been done with his approval. He stated:

I consider this strike very ill-advised; I consider that it was very poorly handled, both by the employees and representatives of the Vermont Milk Chocolate company. It could have easily been avoided by getting in touch with me at Boston and stating the case plainly.⁹⁷

Due to the hot summer weather, however, he said that he would approve the increase piecework rate of two and a half cents per carton of "Norfolk Sweets" until the first of September for the female employees. (At the time the male employees were being paid on hourly wage rates.) Walker went on to say:

We are not going to employ any strikers. We are going to keep open shop. Any employee who is willing to live up to the rules we shall welcome back on Monday morning, but any one who is dissatisfied we believe it a part of good business both for them and for ourselves that they should seek employment elsewhere.⁹⁸

But John Walker's patience had clearly run out. On July 28, 1919, he issued a sharply worded statement to the press:

The strike was the last straw, as it showed us perfectly plain that we would be committing suicide from a financial standpoint if we brought the Miller Candy Company, up there, employing four hundred people, where there was a shortage of help, shortage on housing, poor streets and a city government whose hands were practically tied by being nearly equally divided, Progressive and Reactionary, and we would be caught between the two fires.⁹⁹

With apparent frustration, Walker also spoke out bluntly about the increasingly difficult situation his company faced with their operations in Burlington:

We have decided to locate the Miller Candy factory elsewhere, for we need the room, and to find a location elsewhere for the three-story cocoa building which we were to erect as soon as this plant is completed. We are now paying for labor an equal cost with Boston, where 99 per cent. of our help are efficient, or we do not keep them. In Burlington about 60 per cent. of our help are efficient and the other 40 per cent. want more wages than the efficient ones. Work is the last thing they want to do and a fair return for what they do is the last thing they think of.¹⁰⁰

HARD TRUTHS

Acknowledgments of Burlington's problems voiced by John Walker were also being aired publicly in editorial comments. The same day that Walker issued his statement, the *Burlington Daily News* published an article headlined "Facing the Truth" that observed:

The loss of the Miller Candy Co., ought to lead to a sharp awakening in Burlington—we want more houses, better streets, good fire protection, everything in fact that a progressive city should offer to those whom it would have come to locate within its borders. On the eve of promised industrial expansion it would surely be regrettable to have our plans miscarry. Burlington is due for a very busy time in the immediate future if her sun is to remain in the ascendant.¹⁰¹

Newspaper editors in neighboring Vermont manufacturing communities weighed in on the disappointing situation in Burlington. The *Swanton Courier* commented:

We believe President Walker of the Vermont Milk Chocolate company has given Burlington people to understand that it would be folly to establish the Miller Candy company in a city with general working conditions so unsatisfactory and fire protection so inadequate as in Burlington. Thus they have lost a desirable and sizeable industry because they, as a city, have failed to measure up to what, in the opinion of the directors of the concern, a town should be to deserve an industry of that character.¹⁰²

In an editorial titled “Burlington Falls Down” the *Vergennes Enterprise* also sniped:

When Burlington landed a big chocolate factory it seemed as if the long heralded ‘new era’ had at last ‘dawned’, and that the city would keep up the stride which would justify a raid on the state treasury for \$200,000 for a barge terminal, Burlington being about to become a great industrial center. Alas! that the bubble should so soon have been pricked. The president of the chocolate company makes it plain that if they had it to do over again it is doubtful if the company would go to the Queen City... While this is not complimentary to Burlington, it correctly describes a situation. If Burlington wants a few hundred thousands more which the chocolate company desires to invest, it will have to adopt a different attitude toward “big business.”¹⁰³

For context, a cascade of historically significant global, national, and local events also were unfolding during the summer of 1919. Although the war in Europe was over, the world was changing rapidly in ways that would have long-standing repercussions. In July, race riots in Washington, DC, prompted martial law to be declared. Though ill and soon to suffer a debilitating stroke, President Woodrow Wilson, who had supported racial segregation, authorized military troops to occupy the nation’s capital to quell the violence.¹⁰⁴ The United States House of Representatives also passed an act to enforce the prohibition of alcoholic beverages at a federal level, a key step toward the imposition of Prohibition nationally.¹⁰⁵ And labor unrest during that July included a strike of forty thousand maritime workers demanding wage increases that blocked shipping in most East Coast and Gulf of Mexico ports.¹⁰⁶

At the trial of Vermont Milk Chocolate Company foreman, Henry J. Lapointe held in Burlington city court on August 7, 1919, a group of women workers testified that the altercation began on July 23 after they were denied entry through the main factory entrance when they tried to recruit other workers to strike. After Lapointe told them they could not enter, the strikers said they tried to enter anyway and Lapointe attempted to push them back. In the chaos, Harriett Garvey was allegedly struck, and she fell to the ground unconscious. In his defense, Lapointe testified that it was he who was struck in the face and head by two of the women workers. Others testified that Garvey had fainted about five minutes after the scuffle.¹⁰⁷

On August 11, 1919, the strike at the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company ended and of the 160 female workers who returned to the factory as a group, only sixty were rehired to wrap chocolate bars.¹⁰⁸ In late September 1919, the breach of peace charges against Henry J. Lapointe were dismissed.¹⁰⁹

CHALLENGES AND DISTRESS

Work at the chocolate factory continued, and in October (perhaps seeking fresh help), the firm advertised in the *Rutland Daily Herald* for a hundred new female workers to wrap chocolate bars.¹¹⁰

John Walker admitted that due to shortages of sugar, the Burlington chocolate factory had been running at only about 40 percent capacity, but he also announced that a \$1,500,000 shipment of cocoa beans from São Tomé just purchased in Lisbon, Portugal would be arriving shortly for the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company and the Massachusetts Chocolate Company.¹¹¹ Although the Portuguese colony of São Tomé had become the world's largest exporter of cocoa beans, an infestation of thrips there soon destroyed most of their crop, upsetting global cocoa prices in 1919.¹¹²

In November 1919, the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company announced that they would soon begin manufacturing a new lard-like vegetable shortening product made of undisclosed materials in its new brick factory building in Burlington. To be marketed as "Waneta" shortening, the product was developed by John Walker as a substitute for pork-based lard, which had become expensive and was in short supply.¹¹³ The timing of this new venture seemed fortunate, as due to the global sugar shortage, chocolate production would be almost completely curtailed at the Burlington plant, although there were hopes that the situation could be relieved with sugar shipments from Cuba arriving in January 1920.¹¹⁴

Economic strains on Burlington continued in late 1919 as a newspaper headline warned, "City Departments in Financial Distress." One the largest stresses on the municipal budget came from expenses incurred to install the new water main along Pine Street and Park Avenue to serve the needs of the chocolate factory and the surrounding neighborhood. As a response, Burlington Mayor J. Holmes Jackson vetoed a loan for installing a new roadbed along Park Avenue (now Flynn Avenue) from Pine Street to the railroad tracks.¹¹⁵

In March 1920, Ernest R. Linderholm, the son-in-law of John Walker, was appointed superintendent of the Burlington factory after Everett Buck resigned.¹¹⁶ Business apparently had picked up and soon the company posted advertisements in the *Burlington Free Press* seeking "Girls to Wrap Chocolates," offering a minimum wage of \$13 per week instead of piecework compensation. They also ran "Wanted at Once—50 Men" ads.¹¹⁷

Press releases and large ads published in Boston and Burlington newspapers in early 1920 confidently touted the remarkable successes

of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company and its parent firm, the Massachusetts Chocolate Company, noting that they had manufactured over a quarter of the chocolate produced in the United States since the firm was founded eight years prior, and they had consumed over forty-one million pounds of cocoa beans to produce over seventy-one million pounds of chocolate.¹¹⁸ Richly illustrated ads by the Massachusetts Chocolate Company even proclaimed: “This Week is Wan-eta Cocoa Week... Good grocers recommend it—because its high quality and low price cut down the living-cost.” The ad also stated, “Wan-eta Cocoa is the *only* cocoa made exclusively by the Walker Process—bolted through finest silk—and packed in sanitary, air-tight Fibre containers to preserve its strength and flavor.”¹¹⁹

Perhaps not coincidentally, the Massachusetts Chocolate Company quietly paid a fine without contest in United States District Court in April 1920 for alleged violations of federal Pure Food and Drug laws in response to charges that the company had shipped chocolates adulterated with cocoa bean shells.¹²⁰

In late April 1920, the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company announced that a 10 per cent dividend would be paid on its preferred stock, an increase over its previous dividend of seven percent.¹²¹ Advertisements soon appeared in Vermont newspapers stating that of the 8,000 preferred stock shares that had been authorized, 3,088 shares were still available at \$100 per share.¹²²

But by the summer of 1920, aftereffects of the end of World War I were being felt globally, across America, as well as in Burlington, with shortages of materials, rail transit delays, inflation, and increasing unemployment rates. Indeed, in July 1920, John Walker complained that his plans to manufacture vegetable shortening at the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company plant were delayed as two needed pumps had not been delivered due to railroad service disruptions and strikes.¹²³

The *Burlington Weekly Free Press* also noted in July that unemployment was very high in Burlington, stating, “At present time the Porter Screen company, the American Woolen company and the Vermont Milk Chocolate company are closed down, either entirely or partially, for one reason or another, and that means throwing thousands out of employment.”¹²⁴

RESIGNATION AND COLLAPSE

In late July 1920, John Walker abruptly announced his resignation as general manager of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company and the Massachusetts Chocolate Company. He said that although he would re-

tain his position of president and would serve as an advisor, he wished "to take a rest" and "to unburden himself as far as possible from the work."¹²⁵ Walker also stated that he would soon be leaving on an extended vacation voyage to South America. His son, Byron L. Walker, would head the Massachusetts Chocolate Company, and son-in-law Ernest A. Linderholm, the superintendent of the Burlington factory, would be promoted to its new general manager.¹²⁶

On the evening of October 29, 1920, Fred H. Roberts died of pneumonia at the age of sixty-five years at his estate mansion in Wilmington, Massachusetts. He was the co-founder and vice president of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, as well as the president of the Massachusetts Chocolate Company and numerous other business concerns.¹²⁷ Roberts had sold many of his businesses to retire shortly before his death.¹²⁸

On December 7, 1920, the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company announced that it would immediately shut down its Burlington factory due to a lack of orders and that its production employees would be released, except for a few watchmen and maintenance workers, until business picked up.¹²⁹ Production did resume by early January 1921, but with fewer than a hundred employees returning to work at reduced wages.¹³⁰

John Walker returned to Burlington in March 1921 and offered to the press a bleakly optimistic prognosis for the future of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, observing that although their orders were gradually increasing, "The War is over. False prosperity is past." He admitted, however, that "Our troubles are going to be mainly during the year 1921."¹³¹

LAWSUITS

Evidence of serious problems with the financial status of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company became public in late June 1922 when a complicated lawsuit seeking \$800,000 was filed in federal court against the Burlington firm by the Massachusetts Chocolate Company, its parent company. In the suit, the Massachusetts company sought control of all the real estate, machinery, trucks, raw materials, and manufactured goods belonging to its Burlington subsidiary, which was said to have amassed significant debts and had not provided its shareholders with dividends since the start of 1921.¹³²

It also became clear that the death of millionaire co-founder Fred H. Roberts in October 1920 had inflicted serious financial strains on the two companies. With the loss of his backing, Boston banks were reluc-

tant to offer loans. The complexity of the legal case was demonstrated by the fact that John Walker had served as president and general manager of both chocolate companies, and his son-in-law Ernest Linderholm had served as manager of both of the Burlington and Boston companies. A committee of fifteen shareholders of stock of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company retained legal counsel. Many were prominent Burlington businessmen, including John J. Flynn, W. T. Scofield, Charles P. Smith, John S. Patrick, E. S. Adsit, E. J. Booth, Elias Lyman, and M. J. Barnes.¹³³

In October, preferred stockholders of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company launched a plan to take control the Burlington firm by challenging the lawsuit on the legal grounds of “breach of trust.”¹³⁴ They also sought to have the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company declared bankrupt with a receivership established to oversee the reorganization of the firm.¹³⁵ The Burlington Savings Bank, Chittenden County Trust Company, and the Burlington Light and Power Company also petitioned to have the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company found bankrupt to force payment of overdue notes and bills.¹³⁶

In the case heard in United States District Court in Montpelier in December 1922 by Judge Harland B. Howe, the Massachusetts Chocolate Company and Moors & Cabot investment firm of Boston argued that the bankruptcy petition should be dismissed.¹³⁷

The complex arguments of the case continued to be heard in the federal court in Montpelier into May 1923. John Walker and the company’s treasurer testified about various complex financial arrangements and bookkeeping entries between the Massachusetts Chocolate Company and the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company, including large commissions that the Boston firm charged on products made at its Burlington subsidiary. They also revealed that nearly all the peanut oil used to manufacture the firm’s “vegetable shortening” in Massachusetts was made as a by-product from production of the “peanut crust” used on chocolate bars made in Burlington.¹³⁸

Other hidden charges and expense accounting details were released in the widely reported testimony in the case that was argued for eighteen days. One example was how the Massachusetts company had charged the Vermont company fifteen cents per pound for cocoa beans at a time when the market price was only nine-and-a-half cents per pound.¹³⁹

On June 1, 1923, jurors of the federal court case rendered a surprise verdict awarding \$351,502 to the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company at

the expense of the Massachusetts Chocolate Company.¹⁴⁰ One Vermont newspaper observed:

The verdict given the Vermont Milk Chocolate company in United States District court is gratifying to the large number of stockholders in that concern. The whole proceedings looked like an effort on the part of the Massachusetts Chocolate company to gobble up the Vermont concern and leave the preferred stockholders holding the bag. It makes one feel good to see a court verdict based on fairness and common honesty.¹⁴¹

This was one of the largest awards ever issued by a federal court in Vermont. Although the Massachusetts firm immediately announced an appeal, in September the court upheld the finding and further implemented an additional interest charge on behalf of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company.¹⁴² Soon thereafter equipment owned by the Massachusetts Chocolate Company used at the Burlington factory for manufacturing the lard substitute was put up for sale at public auction.¹⁴³

ADAPTIVE REUSE

Although the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company immediately announced plans to resume manufacturing chocolate in Burlington, the discontinuation of the prior business advantages led the company management to diversify uses of the factory buildings instead.¹⁴⁴ For a while in 1923 and 1924, the Fuller Brush Company leased space to manufacture brooms and broom handles in the north building.¹⁴⁵ Vari-



Flynn Avenue (Park Street) with former Vermont Milk Chocolate factory at left, April 1931. Louis L. McAllister photograph, University of Vermont Special Collections.

ous wood-working businesses later continued to lease space from the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company to manufacture broom handles.

Finally in 1925, the *Burlington Free Press* reported that after extensive negotiations with the US Internal Revenue Service over unpaid taxes, an “amical divorce” was agreed upon between the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company and the Massachusetts Chocolate Company.¹⁴⁶

It also came to light that the economic crisis of 1921 had been a key factor in the chocolate companies’ demise, as they had made ill-timed investments in cocoa beans and peanuts. Full details of the resolution of the litigation revealed that ultimately the Vermont company was unable to secure the court awarded funds because the Massachusetts firm had insufficient assets; nevertheless the preferred shareholders of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company did acquire full title to the Burlington property in March 1926.¹⁴⁷

The Vermont Milk Chocolate Company continued for decades to lease parts of the large manufacturing complex on 208 Flynn Avenue for a variety of uses.¹⁴⁸

John Walker, the founding president of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company and the managing director of the Massachusetts Chocolate Company, died on January 17, 1942.¹⁴⁹ So, too, passed the generation of prominent Burlington investors associated with the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company: Charles P. Smith died in 1937; John J. Flynn in 1940; and John S. Patrick in 1944.¹⁵⁰

In 1948, the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company shareholders settled an arrangement with their major bondholder, the John J. Flynn Estate, to sell the property to Justin Kelly and associates.¹⁵¹ The legal termination of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Company was ultimately confirmed by the Burlington District Court in May 1949.¹⁵²

The property was documented for inclusion in the Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey in 1978.¹⁵³

In 1999, Farrington Properties purchased three of the former Vermont Milk Chocolate Company buildings at 208 Flynn Avenue for \$1,400,000. Architect Brenda Alvarez and David Farrington preserved the complex by renovating about ten thousand square feet of the old factory buildings, providing incubator spaces for a wide variety of uses.¹⁵⁴

Today, this rehabilitated historic factory complex at 208 Flynn Avenue serves as one of Burlington’s vibrant business centers with a café, brand–design studios, human–services center, daycare center, warehouse space, and offices for engineers and architects, as well as for advertising, media, real–estate, and development companies.¹⁵⁵



Former Vermont Milk Chocolate Co. factory west side, view looking south, 2024.

NOTES

¹ "City News," *Burlington Free Press*, 1 February 1917, 8.

² "Merchants Will Help Finance Candy Concern—Leading Men of Burlington Endorse Proposition As One of Sound Basis and a Good Investment," *Burlington Daily News*, 3 February 1917, 8; "Close During Funeral Hour," *Boston Post*, 2 November 1920, 10. Fred H. Roberts was a prosperous businessman who had incorporated the Massachusetts Chocolate Company in 1910 as a subsidiary of his F. H. Roberts Company of Boston, manufacturers of the nationally popular "Apollo Chocolate and Candy" brand. He served as the controlling head of these intertwined firms. Born in 1856 in Berwick, Maine, Roberts had learned the candy making business at an early age in Maine and Rhode Island.

³ "The Home of Apollo Chocolates," *Boston Globe*, 5 January 1913, 14.

⁴ "\$500,000 Concern Ready to Locate in Burlington," *Burlington Free Press*, 3 February 1917, 8.

⁵ Ibid; "Chairman of Burlington Savings Institution and Former President Dies at 90," *New York Times*, 23 September 1927, 27; *Manning's Burlington Winooski and Essex Junction Directory* (Springfield, MA: H. A. Manning Co., 1935), 75, 161.

⁶ "Merchants Will Help Finance Candy Concern," *Burlington Daily News*, 3 February 1917, 8.

⁷ "\$500,000 Concern Ready to Locate in Burlington."

⁸ "City News," *Burlington Free Press*, 15 February 1917, 8; "City News," *Burlington Free Press*, 17 February 1917, 12.

⁹ “The House of a Thousand Candies,” *Burlington Free Press*, 28 February 1920, 8.

¹⁰ “Capital Not Required? Massachusetts Chocolate Co. May Locate Here Anyhow,” *Burlington Free Press*, 26 February 1917, 8; “Site for Factory. Option Secured for Fifteen Acres South of Champlain School,” *Burlington Free Press*, 27 February 1917, 7; “M. J. Barnes Manager,” *Burlington Free Press*, 3 January, 1907, 8.

¹¹ “Pledges For New Chocolate Factory Now Exceed \$150,000,” *Burlington Free Press*, 5 March 1917, 9. Today, this sprawling industrial site at 208 Flynn Avenue is just west of the new Champlain Parkway and north of the Onion River Coop’s South End City Market.

¹² “Business Men At Dinner,” *Burlington Free Press*, March 23, 1917, 8.

¹³ “Cashman Gets Contract. Will Erect First Section on Chocolate Company’s Factory,” *Burlington Free Press*, 23 March 1917, 8.

¹⁴ “J. E. Cashman Has Contract For The New Factory—Was Lowest Bidder for Construction of Building That Must be Completed by July 15—Material Moving,” *Burlington Daily News*, 23 March 1917, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Cashman Gets Contract.”

¹⁸ Henry Nevinson, *A Modern Slavery* (London and New York: Harper and Brothers, 1906), 167–211; Thomas A. Wikle, “Chocolate and the Ugly Secret of Cacao Production on São Tomé Island,” *Focus on Geography*, 64 (2021); Robin Dand, *The International Cocoa Trade* (Elsevier, 2010), 11–17; Silke Hackenesche *Chocolate and Blackness: A Cultural History* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag GmbH, 2017), 32–44.

¹⁹ “Germany Unleashes Her Submarines For Unrestricted Warfare Aimed to Force England into Starvation,” *Burlington Free Press*, 1 February 1917, 1.

²⁰ *Burlington Daily News*, 19 March 1917, 8; *Burlington Free Press*, 31 March 1917, 7.

²¹ “War Declaration,” *New-York Tribune*, 7 April 1917, 1.

²² “Burlington Real Estate Moving Encouragingly. Considerable Activity South Owing to the Coming of the New Chocolate Factory—Demand for Small Houses,” *Burlington Daily News*, 24 May 1917, 5.

²³ “Chocolate Co. Will Run to Utmost Capacity,” *Burlington Daily News*, 1 June 1917, 3.

²⁴ *Rutland Daily Herald*, 6 June 1917, 5.

²⁵ “Chocolate Factory To Open In Fall, Builders Have Had to Overcome Great Obstacles; Machines Ready,” *Burlington Daily News*, 12 July 1917, 8.

²⁶ “City News,” *Burlington Free Press*, 16 July 1917; “To Push Work On The Chocolate Factory Building,” *Burlington Daily News*, 25 July 1917, 6.

²⁷ “Plant of the Vermont Milk Chocolate Co.,” business card, H. M. Haven & Wm. W. Crosby Engineers and Architects, Boston, MA, 1917.

²⁸ “First Draft Will Be For 687,000 Men,” *Burlington Daily News*, 9 July 1917, 1.

²⁹ “Change Contractors? Kieslich Brothers to Complete Chocolate Factory, It Is Said,” *Burlington Free Press*, 23 August 1917, 8.

³⁰ “Male Help Wanted,” *Burlington Daily News*, 5 September 1917, 7; *Rutland Daily Herald*, 20 September 1917, 6.

³¹ *Engineering News*, 30 September 1915, 671; Howard E. Armstrong, Secretary of State, *Vermont Legislative Directory and State Manual* (Montpelier, 1955), 655; Alfred Holden, interview with author, 26 May 2024.

³² “New Chocolate Factory Ready In Two Weeks,” *Burlington Daily News*, 7 November 1917, 8; “City Fathers To Meet Again This Evening,” *Burlington Daily News*, 5 November 1917, 12.

³³ “Damages Fixed—Power Company Can Now String High Tension Wire,” *Burlington Free Press*, 28 November 1917, 9; “Ready For the Power,” *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 20 December 1917, 12.

³⁴ “Building Record of Year,” *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 3 January 1918, 12.

³⁵ “Our Waterpower Opens a Big Field For Industries,” *Burlington Free Press*, 5 February 1918, 4; “Fuel Shortage in Vermont Reaching an Acute Stage,” *Burlington Free Press*, 29 January 1918, 8.

³⁶ “Lands Big Contract,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 8 January 1918, 7.

³⁷ “75 Tons Every 24 Hours—Capacity of New Chocolate Factory When in Full Blast,” *The Burlington Free Press*, 16 January 1918, 9.

³⁸ “Chocolate For Belgians,” *Burlington Free Press*, 29 January 1918, 8; “Money to Be Spent Where Collected. Belgian Relief Committee Announces Plan. Safety of Transportation Covered by

International Agreement," *Boston Globe*, 1 December 1914, 4. The Commission for Relief in Belgium (or CRB) had been established as a charity fund by Herbert Hoover and others in October 1914 shortly after the start of the World War I. Much of the organization's financial support came from American donations solicited by statewide committees.

³⁹ "Female Help Wanted," *Burlington Daily News*, 2 February 1918, 9; "Male Help Wanted," *Burlington Daily News*, 7 February 1918, 9; "Help Wanted," *Burlington Free Press*, 13 February 1918, 11.

⁴⁰ "Chocolate Company May Increase Capital Stock," *Burlington Free Press*, 22 February 1918, 7; "Milk Chocolate Co. Take Over Realty Trust Co. Stock," *Burlington Daily News*, 26 February 1918, 3.

⁴¹ "Suspect Camp Candy," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1918, 3.

⁴² "Suspect Candies Free of Official Ban," *Wilmington Delaware Evening Journal*, 22 February 1918, 13; "Lift Candy Ban at Dix Stores," *Perth Amboy (NJ) Evening News*, 22 February 1918, 4; "War Department Gives Clean Bill to Candy Company," *Burlington Daily News*, 26 February 1918, 5. This was not, however, the first time that the Massachusetts Chocolate Company had encountered legal problems associated with the quality of their products. In April 1918, the United States attorney for Massachusetts filed charges that the company had violated the federal Food and Drug Act by shipping misbranded milk chocolate that contained little or no milk. Prior legal cases against the company also alleged that in some products, butter fat was substituted for cocoa butter and that ground cocoa shells had adulterated their baking cocoa. See "Notices of Judgment Under the Food and Drugs Act," United States Department of Agriculture Bureau of Chemistry, Service and Regulatory Announcements Supplement 45, 10 April 1918, 282–283.

⁴³ "Vermont Milk Chocolate Company Plant Totally Destroyed by Fire—Loss is Estimated at \$2,000,000," *Burlington Free Press*, 26 April 1918, 1.

⁴⁴ "Report Three Dead in \$1,000,000 Fire—Chocolate Factory Burns in Burlington, Vt—Had Belgian Contract—Boston Men Were Owners," *Boston Globe*, 26 April 1918, 4.

⁴⁵ *Burlington Free Press*, 29 April 1918, 7.

⁴⁶ "Appeal From Decision in Upton Case," *Burlington Daily News*, 7 December 1918, 3.

⁴⁷ "City News," *Burlington Free Press*, 29 April 1918, 12.

⁴⁸ "Burlington Will Aid Local Factory," *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 2 May 1918, 7.

⁴⁹ "Happenings in Brief Throughout Vermont," *Rutland News*, 31 May 1918, 4; "Three Men Agree to Cause of Fire," *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 2 May 1918, 7.

⁵⁰ "Awarded Contract," *Boston Globe*, 2 June 1918, 26.

⁵¹ "Month's Work To Clean Up Ruins of Factory Fire," *Burlington Daily News*, 17 June 1918, 5.

⁵² "A Year to Replace Chocolate Factory," *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, 6 June 1918, 8.

⁵³ "Champlain Shops Purchased by Chocolate Co.—Factory Building on Main Street Bought for Possible Temporary Quarters—Plans Tentative," *Burlington Daily News*, 7 June 1918, 3; "Five Ton Trucks Make Rush Trip Here From Boston," *Burlington Daily News*, 25 June 1918, 7.

⁵⁴ "City News," *Burlington Free Press*, 28 June 1918, 10.

⁵⁵ "Chocolate Company In a Race With Time—Completion of New Factory by August 15 Means That Burlington Will Help Fill a Million and Half Dollars' Order for Belgian Government," *Burlington Free Press*, 22 June 1918, 8.

⁵⁶ "Five Ton Trucks Make Rush Trip Here From Boston."

⁵⁷ "Milk Chocolate Factory To Be Rebuilt At Once—John Walker Tells of Big Order and Plans For Rushing Work of Construction Here," *Burlington Daily News*, 24 June 1918, 7.

⁵⁸ "Only Men Trained At Least 6 Months Will Be Sent to France," *Burlington Daily News*, 9 July 1918, 1; "U-Boats About To Strike Again Off U.S. Coast," *Burlington Daily News*, 9 July 1918, 1.

⁵⁹ "Progress Made in New Chocolate Factory Plans," *Burlington Daily News*, 17 July 1918, 10.

⁶⁰ "125 Men Employed to Rush Work On Chocolate Factory," *Burlington Daily News*, 25 July 1918, 5.

⁶¹ "Supply of Water Is Now Adequate—Aldermanic Committee Reports on Fire Protection in Vicinity of Chocolate Factory and Recommends That Company Install Pressure Pump and Main," *Burlington Free Press*, 6 August 1918, 2.

⁶² "Gasoline Here for Standard Oil Company," *Burlington Free Press*, 6 August 1918, 2; "Spanish Epidemic Spreads to Britain," *Burlington Daily News*, 2 July 1918, 5.

⁶³ "Nation Still in Grip of Spanish Influenza," *Burlington Free Press*, 12 October 1918, 13.

⁶⁴ "Ethan Allen Club House As Hospital," *Burlington Daily News*, 14 October 1918, 3.

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