

**ANNEXATION OF
CHARLESTOWN AND
SOMERVILLE TO
BOSTON. A CONDENSED
REPORT OF THE ARGUMENT**

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Annexation of Charlestown and Somerville to Boston. A condensed report of the argument by
Ellis W. Morton

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ELLIS W. MORTON

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Annexation of Charlestown and Somerville to Boston.

A CONDENSED REPORT OF THE

ARGUMENT

OF

HON. ELLIS W. MORTON,

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATURE ON TOWNS,

*In behalf of the petitioners for an act authorizing the
union of Charlestown and Somerville
with Boston,*

MONDAY, FEB. 27, 1871.

BOSTON:

ALFRED MUDGE & SON, PRINTERS, 34 SCHOOL STREET.

1871.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:

In the outset of my argument, permit a suggestion that the various petitions referred to you do not call for a determination of the question of *annexation* itself. In frequent instances petitioners request the legislature, by the exercise of its high authority, to adjust municipal boundaries, not in accordance with the sanction of a majority of all the people interested, but in concurrence with the will of *certain* people. This class of cases oftentimes presents serious difficulties to the impartial legislator.

The question now debated is a simple one: whether a rectification of boundaries may be permitted in accordance with the deliberately recorded will of a majority of all the people of all the communities concerned.

The committee might properly dispose of this investigation with the limited inquiry—Are there any sufficient reasons why the union of Boston, Charlestown and Somerville, should not be assented to? but the tendency of the hearing has been towards the broader inquiry why it should be, and the committee will involuntarily entertain it.

The very facts of this hearing and of the patient sittings of yourselves and your predecessors in similar investigations, are a complete refutation of the

theories of "natural boundaries," at least so far as it is sought to apply them to the communities of Massachusetts.

A few untaught individuals, living in an isolated position, might be restricted to their territory by natural obstacles; but when intelligent communities, ready in art and science, subject water to ferries, as is the case with different sections of Boston, or when they actually tie themselves together by a bridge, as Charlestown and Boston have done, then it is idle to discuss "natural boundaries." The bridge thrown over the railways between Boston proper and South Boston, does not differ as a connection, or as an avenue of travel, from that which spans the waterway between Boston and Charlestown.

If there may be a "natural boundary," a river is certainly not often established as such in commercial places. It is regarded as a valuable commercial highway, the possession of which seems almost a condition of importance. I might cite in support of this suggestion, nearly every conspicuous city abroad.

Boundaries must be adjusted to communities, not communities to boundaries.

The committee will, doubtless, consider somewhat the significance and extent of the agitation in favor of annexation, and while the inquiry whether a majority of all the citizens in the three municipalities are annexationists is unessential, and must be a subject of difference, yet it is incumbent upon the petitioners to show that a sufficient number desire it to entitle them to the attention of the legislature.

In 1854, the legislature passed an act authorizing the union of Boston and Charlestown, and it was accepted by a very large majority of the voters of both cities, but subsequently set aside by the supreme court for a constitutional defect. Never since, though repeatedly demanded, has an opportunity been given by the legislature to these cities to reassert their desires in this domestic matter.

The only time they have been enabled to declare their judgment, the majority of the people pronounced emphatically in favor of annexation. Since then, Boston has indicated her concern to enlarge her cramped limits by the annexation at different times of Roxbury and Dorchester. This year, you have heard the voice of her citizens through her representatives in the city government, who have instructed the mayor to petition the legislature to submit the question of annexation to the decision of the people, in recognition of the high principles of democratic government. In aid of this authoritative petition, you have those of a very large and estimable body of individuals.

Charlestown has, since 1831, been troubled with the untiring attempts of a great number of her citizens to secure the exercise of a right, hardly a privilege, which has been once accorded. When, in a solitary instance, the right was admitted by the legislature, they unhesitatingly exercised it in favor of annexation; but having lost the enjoyment of the fruits of its exercise through an oversight of the legislature itself, their almost yearly petitions, ever regarded

favorably by committees, have been rejected through the influence of the enormous county of Middlesex, the largest in the commonwealth, with its open treasury, which they themselves helped to fill, a county with which they have no harmony of interests, and within whose uncongenial grasp they are confessedly held solely because they pay her annually twelve thousand dollars more than they cost her.

Now these oft-disappointed, I may say aggrieved humble petitioners, men of high character and broad views, many of them men of wealth, with enterprise to direct its employment to the public advantage, all of them intelligent, earnest, progressive, good citizens, are here for the ninth time, supported by evidence of unusual worth; and if needs be, they will come for the tenth time to pray that their community may be suffered to enjoy the rights yielded freely to others similarly situated, rights, the enjoyment of which are, in their belief, absolutely necessary to the advancement of their personal prosperity and development of the highest public interests.

The disposition of the citizens of Somerville has been declared in a resolve passed in a legal town meeting, April 10, 1869, in favor of annexation, and by the election of Mr. Bowman, the annexation candidate, to the legislature, by a vote of 537 against 237 for the regular republican nominee, who received the votes of many annexationists.

It is true, that when their wish was found not to enlist the sympathy of the last legislature, and when it was supposed repeated rebuffs would dishearten

the annexationists of Charlestown, the territory of which lies between Boston and Somerville, the town voted (38 to 12), without rescinding the previous vote, to ask this legislature for a city charter. Their first choice is annexation; failing in that, they desire a city charter, and it is but ordinary justice that they should have one.

Passing the matter of public interest in the question of annexation, let me establish the palpable propriety of it.

This is found in the smallness of the area of the three places, in the propinquity of Charlestown and Somerville to the business, working, actual centre of Boston, and in their entire identity of interest with her.

Boston, the capital of the commonwealth, the commercial exchange of New England, at least she should be, has but 9,902 taxable acres, between three and four thousand less than the *average* area of our towns. Charlestown, against the solemnly registered will of a majority of her citizens, suffers the grievous burdens of the support of the machinery of an independent government for a comparatively insignificant spot of 520 taxable acres; less land than many a Massachusetts farmer rules. If the State were cut up into towns of the size of this dwarf city, whose influence is nothing to that of the Middlesex county commissioners, we might boast of 8,522 instead of 338. Somerville has only 1,975 taxable acres, taken from Charlestown, at a time when she had two dis-

tinct and unharmonious classes of citizens, — a commercial and manufacturing class, and an agricultural class, — living under a system of government not adapted to both.

Wipe out the artificial outgrown boundaries of a former and different time, and unite these small parcels of territory, and our commercial metropolis will have for her growth only 12,397 acres, less still than the average of the towns of the commonwealth, as against the 82,560 acres of Philadelphia.

The city hall of Charlestown is but a mile from the city hall of Boston, and Charlestown divides Suffolk county. The whole of the territory of Somerville, more easily and frequently accessible by rail than any other suburb of Boston, is nearer to her city hall than are the extremes of her southern line.

There is an admitted community of interests between the petitioners; they are actually one commercial people, whose business and employment have a common centre in Boston; their prosperity depends upon the same conditions; they are mutually benefited by the municipal enterprises, though unequally taxed, and they are alike injured by the municipal errors or neglect of Boston.

The Charlestown merchant is nearer his Boston counting-room than the majority of the Boston merchants, and the Somerville-Boston merchant is as prompt at his warehouse as the merchant of the West or South End. Three-fourths of the polls of Charlestown find daily occupation in Boston, and four-fifths of the business men of Somerville have