

## Main Street Stories: Opera House Block

There has been a pharmacy operating in the Opera House block on the southeast corner of Main and Fourth streets ever since the building opened its doors in late 1890. John T. Norton was the first drug store proprietor there, and his store was followed by the pharmacies of Zeno Schoolcraft, T. Kenneth Fetters, Richard J. Morley, and Robert A. Lytle.

The man behind the construction of the Opera House block was Charles A. Burr (1857-1934). Burr was one of eight sons of German immigrants Louis and Eliza Gendrick Burr, who came to America in 1850 and soon thereafter settled in Sterling Township in Macomb County. Charles Burr was truly a "man of all trades" and had a varied career that followed several occupational paths. He started out as a school teacher, traveled to California in 1876 to mine gold for three years, then returned to the Utica area to run a hardware business. He brought his hardware business to Rochester in 1882 and also served as the town postmaster for a time. Among the other businesses he engaged in while in Rochester were undertaking, men's clothing, real estate, and fire insurance; he also served as an agent for the local express company.

C.A. Burr's diversified business interests must have served him well. He built the substantial business block at Fourth & Main in 1890, providing retail space on the first floor and an entertainment and public meeting venue, known simply as the Opera House, on the second floor. He also founded the Bank of Rochester along with partner A.F. Newberry, and was financially interested in several other banks in the greater Detroit area.

At the same time that Charles Burr was building his new block, his brother [Frank H. Burr](#), was building a two-store block immediately to the south of the Opera House block. At the close of 1890, the two Burr brothers controlled the first four storefronts south of Fourth on the east side of

Main. Ten years later, in 1900, another of their brothers, [George Burr](#), would join them as members of the merchant community in Rochester.

The Opera House block, with its signature Richardsonian arches which were restored by owner Robert A. Lytle in 1986-87, is still one of the most recognizable structures in any image of Main Street. The building was listed on the State Register of Historic Places and received a [Michigan Historical Marker](#) in 1991. The Opera House block celebrates its 121st birthday this year.

Postcard view of the Opera House block about 1910

