

Anthony Marchetta



DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Anthony Marchetta’s life began in New Brunswick: “St. Peter’s Hospital, March 1949.” [3] The child of Italian immigrants, Marchetta grew up in New Brunswick, graduated from the local high school in 1967, went to Rutgers University, and eventually worked for the City of New Brunswick. [3] He described New Brunswick when he was growing up in the 1950s:

It was a vibrant, small town in central New Jersey. It was the county seat. It was a great community to grow up in. It was diverse. We had a vibrant downtown. Saturdays you would go downtown in New Brunswick, and it was so crowded you could barely walk the streets. It was that kind of place. There must have been a dozen men’s clothing stores. We had four movie theaters—the State, the Rivoli, the Strand, and the Albany. [3-4]

This changed when he was a teenager. He remembered a neighbor’s visit to the new Menlo Park mall as a distinctive moment: It was the “beginning of New Brunswick’s ebb.” [4] As housing, retail, and commerce moved to the suburbs, “New Brunswick lost its reason for being in many ways,” Marchetta said. “It was no longer the commercial center of the region, and little by little the shopping centers were built in the suburbs and downtown New Brunswick lost its vitality.” [4] While New Brunswick still had its institutional assets—the county government, Rutgers University, Johnson & Johnson, two hospitals—“little by little the community became a daytime community and less and less of a full-time community for residents,” Marchetta said.

“While I was at Rutgers starting in the fall of ’67,” Marchetta said, “things were obviously changing in the community—racial tensions were getting higher, and then there were the riots of ’68.” [5] “It was already declining in my mind because of the lack of its purpose as being a commercial center,” Marchetta said; “racial tensions” aggravated this decline and many residents left. [6] Another factor in the decline was the deregionalization of the New Brunswick high school. This occurred when North Brunswick looked to break off and build its own high school in the mid-1970s. One reason for the separation was a booming population in North Brunswick, though Marchetta said, “The subtext was we were going to be in a safer environment, we’re not going to have the minorities,

we're not going to have the poor people there, we're going to create our own little suburban community." [6] When North Brunswick pulled its students out, the New Brunswick high school shrunk dramatically in size and the racial proportions changed. [6]

When Marchetta returned to New Brunswick High School in 1971 as a substitute teacher, he observed that "it became less formal, more casual, and less in control." [7] He was asked to show up everyday because he was one of the few teachers that could control the students, while other teachers were "validly afraid" of the students. "If you had a kid in this environment and you had the resources, you were getting your kid out of there." [8] The school environment "escalated" the decline of New Brunswick, which Marchetta considered to be in the late 1960s, early 1970s. "All the urban areas were struggling in the state, and this was just another example of it," he said. [8] That Johnson & Johnson did not leave New Brunswick saved the city from slipping further.

Marchetta began working for the City in housing rehabilitation as part of the federal program FACE (Federally Assisted Code Enforcement). [9] In the Feaster Park neighborhood, inspectors checked that the structures met the minimum code standards, and if they did not, low-interest loans and grants would be provided to assist the property owners in compliance. [9] This job led to a position as the assistant city administrator in New Brunswick. [13] At this time, no revitalization was under way. He did note "the 1950s' major urban renewal plan" where the City "cleared a large section of New Brunswick." [15] This was when homes were demolished to build the Memorial Homes public housing, which Marchetta said "failed." [15] He said that when the homes were built, "it was not 99 percent minority. It was integrated." [15]

Later, when Patricia Sheehan was elected mayor, Johnson & Johnson began considering its future in New Brunswick, and it funded a feasibility study by the American Cities Corporation. Marchetta was interviewed as a part of the study to try to determine whether New Brunswick could be revitalized. [16-17] The published study advised, "There should be two major thrusts." One was the planning and social service thrust, i.e., New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT), and the redevelopment thrust, which is now Devco (New Brunswick Development Corporation). [17] When an interviewer noted that this plan did not mention City government, Marchetta responded that NBT and Devco, as private entities, "had more flexibility and could reach out for more dollars" than the municipality. He added that "J&J couldn't really give money directly to the City and control it. They could give money to a nonprofit that they had board control of and kind of supervise the distribution of the dollars and the programs that they were doing." [17]

Marchetta discussed New Brunswick politics—how there had been "an old regime that controlled City Hall for decades," including John Lynch, Sr., and Richard Mulligan, Sr.; the New Five that looked to "change the politics in town" by ousting the old guard; former Mayor Richard Mulligan, a Johnson & Johnson executive; and Patricia Sheehan, who

received the highest number of votes in a contentious 1967 election, making her mayor in the commission-style government. [21-23]

New Brunswick experienced small-scale riots shortly after Sheehan became mayor though she was able to calm the crowds, something mayors of other cities had failed to do. [25] Sheehan was elected to a second term in which the New Brunswick municipal government changed from mayor–commission form to “strong mayor–council form.” [25] Midway into her term Sheehan resigned to accept a position as the commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs and Al Cooper, a member of the New Five, was appointed to complete the term. With Sheehan in Trenton, the New Five entered the 1975 mayoral election backing Al Cooper, an African American, against John A. Lynch, Jr., and Richard Mulligan. Cooper lost the election to Mulligan. [25] As a result, “The second generation of the old regime came back, led by John Lynch.” [25]

Marchetta said that during this time—the late 1970s—the redevelopment movement was “treading water” and was not controlled in any way by the City—it was “really being done by J&J.” [28] He explained how “J&J’s initial thrust was New Brunswick Tomorrow” to confront social issues before considering physical redevelopment. [27] The focus on social issues related to the Middlesex County Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which was rather influential in New Brunswick. [28] Marchetta noted that the CETA program helped establish an Emergency Medical Taxi (EMT) department, developed a recycling program that had been initiated by Rutgers students, started a senior citizen center, and through the George Street Playhouse helped fund a Hispanic theater company and the African American theater company, Crossroads. [29-31] Marchetta remarked that CETA was “the closest to the WPA [Works Progress Administration] that I can think of that we’ve ever done.” [31]

He described the first Devco redevelopment project, a commercial building on 303 George Street. [32] Johnson & Johnson backed the project and agreed to pre-lease space. Still, Marchetta recalled financial difficulties: “They ultimately had to put together a consortium of something like a dozen banks to fund that little office building because nobody wanted to take the risk of investing in New Brunswick. That’s how bad it was. Nobody would fund New Brunswick.” [32] The architectural firm I. M. Pei & Partners designed this building as something of a “side project” while also working on the Johnson & Johnson headquarters, Marchetta said. [32]

When asked about who was controlling the redevelopment process, Marchetta responded: “J&J was running it. I think the general population would say that J&J was running both New Brunswick Tomorrow and Devco.” [34] However, this changed somewhat when John A. Lynch, Jr. took office. “There are obviously criticisms of the man,” Marchetta said, “but he is a strong leader, and he’s a very bright individual. He knew the political games. He became a good foil for J&J going off and doing everything

on its own.” [35] Because Lynch was a strong mayor, he could balance out a process that had been an overwhelmingly private effort. “When John Lynch became mayor it became the City and the private sector doing it,” Marchetta said. [35] He added that Lynch “was able to position the City to be the beneficiary of a lot of public investment,” especially after he became a state senator. [35]

Marchetta spoke about the origins of the George Street Playhouse and how for a time it occupied a former Acme supermarket. [36] He remembered receiving tickets to a production of *Sleuth*—a play he had seen on Broadway—and being “stunned at how good the performance was.” [37] After this, he and his wife “immediately signed up as subscribers the following year trying to support the effort for this theater.” [37] The George Street Playhouse helped the city progress: It was open at night; it attracted visitors and fostered restaurant activity.

Marchetta joined the George Street Playhouse board and later became board president. [37] While on the board, the theater was in “financial disarray”; one reason was that as the New Brunswick streetscape was being remodeled, visitors had trouble accessing the theater. [38] As a precaution, each board member pledged \$5,000 for an emergency fund. To help refinance the theater’s funding, Marchetta met with the Middlesex County Bank, which agreed to a loan but only if the Playhouse could find another lender. Marchetta then went to the Franklin State Bank, where he benefited from “another series of dumb luck.” [39] The bank chairman, Tony Shoveril, had just returned from a conference in San Francisco, the same conference one of Marchetta’s fraternity brothers attended. He mentioned his friend’s name, Don Peret, a banker at Irving Trust. It turned out that the chairman had spent a week during the conference with Peret, leading to a half-hour conversation about the trip. [40] When Marchetta finally asked for a \$100,000 loan, Shoveril responded “Okay.” [40]

Marchetta served as president of the George Street Playhouse board from 1981 to 1985. During this time the board was able to stabilize the theater’s finances, especially with the help of Don Becker, the CFO of Chicopee, a Johnson & Johnson subsidiary. [40-41] In 1983, Johnson & Johnson “was really pushing to do the Golden Triangle Project,” and the George Street Playhouse was approached to see if it would be willing to sell its building, which was on the proposed building site. “My response was ‘Absolutely,’” Marchetta said, as long as the theatre received just compensation and there was a new building available. Devco responded with its “great idea”: to move the theater to a grocery store “in front of three large buildings of public housing.” [42] Marchetta was “very upset” with this offer. He was concerned about losing visitors and business. The previous location was across the street from Johnson & Johnson and nearby Rutgers, while the proposed location was “in a much more desperate part of New Brunswick.” [42] The Playhouse board expressed its problems with the plan at a meeting with Devco and Johnson &

Johnson, which “did not go well to say the least. We left. Nobody was happy,” Marchetta said. [42-43]

He reached out to John Heldrich to “maintain relationships.” “I asked if he could help us by funding a site-selection effort, and we would engage a consultant that knew theaters, that would explore possible locations in New Brunswick,” Marchetta explained. Heldrich agreed. [43] The consultant considered the grocery store location, the YMCA, and the possibility of a reconfigured Ferren Deck. [43] The latter appealed to Marchetta because of its proximity to the train station, though the YMCA location was significant from a “long-term perspective” because of its proximity to the State Theater. [43-44] The YMCA location was chosen and renovated for two million dollars. The Playhouse “traded ownership of a building to a long-term leasehold,” Marchetta said. [46] The new theater opened in 1985: “We had this beautiful new facility. We were able to sell tickets. We had a rent that we could afford,” Marchetta said. [49] The theater became more stable, benefited from a larger ticket base, and “started to flourish.” [49] Marchetta left the board after 16 years, in 1998. He added that “J&J underestimated the power of the arts,” but that the company “is delighted” by the success, which in turn has spurred the development of quality restaurants. [49-50]

Marchetta spoke about how New Brunswick’s desire to “restore the community to full functions” is closer to actualization because new housing has been developed. [50] He noted that the first attempt at housing—the Hiram Market Townhouses—“struggled for decades,” not because of a poor product, but rather because “nobody was ready to move into New Brunswick.” [50-51] This project was able to survive because Devco was behind it; “If a private developer had done that he would be bankrupt,” Marchetta said. [51] Lately there is more of an “urban market,” and Marchetta observed that New Brunswick was “one of the leaders in that.” [51] Marchetta contested “the idea that gentrification is bad, because gentrification brings in more money, and unless you have people with disposable income, a city will never get back to its economic health.” [51]

When asked about New Brunswick as a model, Marchetta responded, “I think it’s a model that is much more replicable today than it was when New Brunswick started it.” This is true in older urban areas with existing infrastructure, such as train stations, that is not necessarily replicable in other communities. [54] Because trains have become “a much more valid form of transportation and much more acceptable from the marketplace,” places like New Brunswick are able to benefit. Still, Marchetta conceded, New Brunswick is “not going to be a full-fledged family-potential community without good schools.” [55] He thinks, however, that the education options are “getting better.” [55]

Marchetta compared New Brunswick with Plainfield to show why New Brunswick was unique. Both were “roughly the same size.” Plainfield had, at one point, a stronger

economy. But Plainfield faltered after the 1960s, partly because it “didn’t have the same long-term staying-power institutions” that New Brunswick had. [56]

The role of Rutgers in the revitalization of New Brunswick has been “underestimated,” Marchetta said. [56] He noted some key contributions: supporting the George Street Playhouse; moving the Mason Gross School to downtown; building a large, downtown dormitory; and the new Civic Square building that houses the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. [56] He compared this reinvestment with his experience during the 1960s and 1970s when “everything was moving out of town,” to Livingston and Busch campuses. “What we’ve seen in the last decade and a half is that it has turned its direction back into town, and that’s made a big difference in New Brunswick,” Marchetta said. [56]

In hindsight, Marchetta regretted how Hiram Market turned out. “I think there was room in New Brunswick to have a section that could have been preserved as something that had some history to it,” he said, “and New Brunswick has historically not done that.” [57] He also noted that New Brunswick has poor connectivity to the Raritan River due to Route 18. [58] In the past there were events such as the River Festival, which “brought lots of people into town” and “[created the perception] in the general public’s mind that you could go to New Brunswick and not get knifed.” [58-59] Marchetta thought Hiram Market could have become a festival location to encourage more events in the city. [59]

Reflecting on community involvement, Marchetta thought that “is important to a degree, but what does a community know about redevelopment?” [59] The community lacks the “big-picture view, and unless you have a corporate private-sector involvement coupled with a public sector, you could have community meetings from now until eternity and nothing will ever get done.” [59] Rather, it is more important to have institutions that can support the needs of a city through tax revenues, Marchetta said.

Marchetta noted how the New Brunswick Parking Authority is used the same way an improvement authority would be used elsewhere: for the rights to condemnation and acquisition. [60]

John A. Lynch, Jr. and John Heldrich were “the most significant people in this process,” Marchetta remarked. [61] Lynch was an adept politician, able to vouch for funding. Heldrich, an executive at Johnson & Johnson, had “personal history in New Brunswick.” [61] The leadership of these two, as well as their continuity, were key reasons that the New Brunswick revitalization achieved success. [62]

KEY QUOTATIONS

[Quotations have been edited for grammar and alphabetized by topic]

American Cities Corporation Report

Johnson & Johnson, as business people, took that report as if it were a cooking recipe and followed it to the tee. In many respects they did a good job; some things fell short, but overall J&J has got to be commended for what it was able to accomplish. [20-21] Government bureaucracy wouldn't allow [the City] to act directly, and being a private entity [Johnson & Johnson] had flexibility and could reach out for more dollars. Plus, J&J couldn't really give money directly to the City and control it. It could give money to a nonprofit, maintaining board control, and supervise the distribution of the dollars and the programs they were doing. [17]

The Arts

I think J&J underestimated the power of the arts. J&J is delighted, I'm sure, that George Street has succeeded, which then spurred the redevelopment of the State Theater, which was in large measure funded by Middlesex County, in addition to the locals and the state. [49-50]

Community Involvement

It is important to a degree, but what does a community know about redevelopment? I don't think the general community has the big-picture view. And unless you have a corporate private-sector involvement coupled with a public sector, you could have community meetings from now until eternity and nothing will ever get done. Community input is required, but not community control. Unless you start to build the institutions that can pay the taxes to support them, it's not going to happen. So you have to do it in some economic order, and I think community input is important—but let the professionals design it. [59-60]

Cultural Center

With the restoration of the State Theater and the George Street Playhouse next to it, and then Crossroads—you had three functioning theaters. To my mind, none of the theater growth that occurred in New Brunswick—the restaurant growth—would have occurred in New Brunswick without it, and all of a sudden you went from a town where a pub was fine dining to Panico's, which was great, and then La Fontana, and little by little more and more restaurants—all of a sudden, New Brunswick became a restaurant spot on the New Jersey map, and to this day, I think, between Hoboken and New Brunswick, you have more Zagat-rated restaurants than anywhere else. I think Hoboken is one and New Brunswick is number two. So that made a big difference in getting people to come back into town. [50-51]

303 George Street—First Redevelopment Project

I recall J&J taking the lead: "Let's build this building." And Devco was in charge of it. But no one would finance it, and they ultimately had to put together a consortium of something like a dozen banks to fund that little office building because nobody wanted to take the risk of investing in New Brunswick. Not only were they behind it, but they pre-leased it, and put in

Chicopee, which was then a division of J&J in the building. So it was a no-brainer as far as a development project, but it took that kind of incentive to get people to come and reinvest in New Brunswick—and it was successful. [31-32]

Hiram Market and Historic Preservation

I think there was room in New Brunswick to have a section that could have been preserved as something that had some history to it. New Brunswick historically has not done that. Not only Hiram Market—there was a mansion on Hamilton Street called Strong Mansion. The Strong family goes back to pre-colonial days, and in that mansion at one point, four or five different presidents had stayed. [57]

Hyatt Hotel

The Hyatt Hotel was a great idea because New Brunswick formerly had a hotel, the Roger Smith, that had been the jewel of New Brunswick for many years, but it was closed; it was a great hotel at one point. And now you had no hotel. So with J&J building its headquarters, having a hotel convenient to it—there you had your built-in user. An Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) was used to acquire the dollars—public/private involvement. [53]

John A. Lynch, Jr.

It was a good thing for the city [when Lynch became mayor] because he was a strong leader and very bright individual. He knew the political games. He was bred into the political process, so he knew it better than anybody. And he became a good foil for J&J going off and doing everything on its own. He [struck a] balance, because it was not really a public/private partnership—it was really a private effort at that point. When John Lynch became mayor it became the City and the private sector doing it. [35]

Things would have been done differently if there was not a strong partner at City Hall, and John Lynch was that strong partner at City Hall. John was able to achieve public investment, especially after he became a state senator, that I think would have never occurred without him. Devco and J&J couldn't have done it by themselves. So, I think the fact that John was able to position the City to be the beneficiary of a lot of public investment was probably the strongest thing. [35]

John J. Heldrich

John Heldrich is a very key person in the whole process. If you had to name the most significant people in this process, it had to be John Lynch and John Heldrich—the two of them together. John Heldrich, who was a senior executive at Johnson & Johnson, had his history—his personal history—in New Brunswick, and you had these two people come together with the private sector and public sector at a level where they could influence their respective environments, their organizations, to focus on New Brunswick. That's very rare.

Johnson & Johnson (J&J)

The general population would say that J&J was running both New Brunswick Tomorrow (NBT) and Devco (New Brunswick Development Corporation), with input from the City. [34]

Leadership

There are a lot of towns that try to redevelop, but without question—after my 20, 30, 40 years now in government and development—the one key element that is necessary, more than anything else, is leadership. You can look at a community that has the same resources as another and one is successful and one is an outright failure—and why? It's leadership. [61-62]

Memorial Homes Public Housing

It was terrible. The buildings were very, very basic. Yet when they were built, it was not 99 percent minority. It was integrated. [15]

New Brunswick before its Decline

It was a vibrant, small town in central New Jersey. It was the county seat. It was diverse. There must have been a dozen men's clothing stores. We had four movie theaters—the State, the Rivoli, the Strand, and the Albany. [3-4]

New Brunswick in Decline

New Brunswick lost its reason for being in many ways. It was no longer the commercial center of the region—little by little the shopping centers start being built in the suburbs and downtown New Brunswick lost its vitality. [4-5]

New Brunswick during Racial Unrest in the 1960s

In New Brunswick in 1968, Pat Sheehan was the new mayor of this town—a slight woman. I remember a photo in the Home News of this frail woman standing at the top of the stairs in front of a huge crowd of African Americans, essentially trying to calm the crowd—and she succeeded. We did not have severe riots in New Brunswick—much less severe than in Plainfield or Newark. I give a lot of credit to the administration at that point, and Al Cooper, an African American—a prominent African American in the community—with Pat Sheehan, I think, quelled the community and tried to say, “We’ll work to improve the environment.” So we fared better, much better, than other communities as a result. You have to give the leaders of the community the thanks for that. [24-25]

New Brunswick High School’s Decline

Starting in the fall of 1967, things were obviously changing in the community—racial tensions and the riots of 1968 started to change things in New Brunswick. It was already declining in my mind because of its lack of purpose as a commercial center, but when it had the racial tensions, people who could do so sought safer environments. North Brunswick, which had signed a contract in the early to mid-sixties to stay in the New Brunswick school system for ten years beginning in '67, made it known, as they approached the end of that ten-year period, that they wanted to build their own high school in North Brunswick. So somewhere in the mid-1970s, North Brunswick pulled out. [5-6]

During the time I was substitute-teaching (1971), fire alarms were being pulled regularly. It was a tough school environment. If you had a kid in that environment and you had

the resources, you were getting your kid out of there, for valid reasons. That escalated the spiral of the city. [7-8]

Residential Development

The goal of Devco and New Brunswick Tomorrow was to restore the community to full function. It's almost there—because they've created housing. The first housing they created was in the old Hiram Market area, which struggled for decades. The townhouses—it wasn't the product, it was that no one was ready to move into New Brunswick. But there's been a coalition and combination of forces that have all come together. The urban market has created itself. You can sell houses and condos in urban areas where you never would have believed. New Brunswick was one of the leaders in that. New Brunswick needs more middle-income people. I don't believe in the idea that gentrification is bad, because gentrification brings in more money, and unless you have people with disposable income, a city will never get back its economic health. I think it took a long time for residential housing to get developed, but it's now reaching a point where it's successful. [50-51]

Rutgers University's Role in Revitalization

I think it was underestimated. I think Rutgers really did a lot, because it was the university and the faculty that supported institutions like the George Street Playhouse. It was Bloustein that committed to put the Mason Gross School into the old building. It was Rutgers that agreed to build this facility in town. It's Rutgers that built the new dormitory in town. Without those kinds of things, where would New Brunswick be today? In my mind, a lot further down on the redevelopment ladder of success: The fact that Rutgers was here plays a very significant role. When I was at Rutgers, everything was moving out of town. What we've seen in the last decade and a half is that it has turned its direction back into town, and that's made a big difference in the City of New Brunswick.

Transferability

New Brunswick is unique in my mind compared with, for example, Plainfield—roughly the same size. At one point the economics in Plainfield were much stronger than New Brunswick; there was a lot more money there. But after the riots of the 1960s, it didn't have the same long-term, staying-power institutions. It had a hospital. It had a major corporation—but New Brunswick had two hospitals, it had the County seat, which Plainfield does not have. [55-56]

Transportation Access

Older urban areas have the infrastructure that is both aged in some cases but also irreplaceable in others. The railroad station is right in downtown New Brunswick. The fact that the Gateway will work in large measure is because it's right in downtown New Brunswick. The reason that Omar Boraie's One Spring Street works is because it is a block away from the train station. The trains have become, in the last 25 years, a much more valid form of transportation and much more acceptable from the marketplace. So being near the train station helps. [53-54]