

We dedicate this special  
issue to the memory of  
Charlotte McNeill.



# FirmForum

NEWS FROM CHADBOURNE & PARKE LLP

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## IN MEMORY

### A Tribute to Charlotte

*by Larry Savell, NY Counsel*



Among the greatest gifts one can receive is to have people, be they a relative, a friend, or a colleague, who truly touch and make a difference in one's life, through their caring, compassion, counsel, and/or humor. For all of us at Chadbourne, today and over the past 50-plus years, one of those very special people was Charlotte McNeill, and all of

those qualities — and more — applied to her.

The Chadbourne Family lost its matriarch on October 9, when our beloved Charlotte passed away. We fully expected her resilient spirit to overcome her latest illness, as it had overcome her prior afflictions and crushing personal tragedies, but sadly that was not to be. We miss her greatly, and she will always be in our thoughts.

But while we deeply mourn Charlotte's passing, we also affirmatively celebrate her life, her joy of life, her humor and wit, and her deep sense of caring for and commitment to others.

Charlotte dedicated her professional career to Chadbourne, devoting more than half a century to the firm. An October 17, 1952 "Blue Memo" advised that "Mrs. McNeill has been hired as a stenographer at the rate of \$2.00 per hour and will work on Mondays and Fridays." Her first day of work was Monday, October 20. Shortly thereafter she moved to full-time.

Her "Confidential Application for Employment," completed on October 16, 1952, provided a brief overview of her life before coming to Chadbourne (which, at the time, was known as "Chadbourne, Parke, Whiteside, Wolff & Brophy" and was located downtown at 25 Broadway, ("New York 4, New York"). Charlotte Doerrler was born in Brooklyn on April 28, 1918, a Sunday in which *The New York Times* front page bore a banner headline reporting on the Russian Revolution and stories on the latest battles in the First World War. Here

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Her parents Carl and Marie (as she recently explained, “I didn’t come down in a bottle of whiteout”) owned a deli, and Charlotte helped out. Charlotte attended P.S. 126 from 1922 until her graduation in 1932, and St. Joseph’s Commercial High School from 1932 until her graduation in 1934. She also did some “Post-Graduate” work in 1934.

Among other work before coming to Chadbourne, Charlotte was employed from 1941-1945 as a legal secretary at the firm of Boyd & Holbrook, located at 60 Broadway. She indicated her “Reason for Leaving” that position was “Marriage.” Charlotte’s husband was Edward Vincent (“Mac”) McNeill. In recent recorded interviews that I and others had the privilege to conduct in celebration of Charlotte’s milestones (which are the source of her many quotes reported here), she advised that quite literally “Mac was the boy next door,” whom she had known since the age of nine. With her characteristic humor, she further speculated regarding her married name, “that is why everybody thinks I am Irish and I have to tell them [laughter] well, the way I tell them maybe you don’t want to hear it — by impregnation only.” After Mac went into the service, Charlotte did “various part-time legal steno” work.

*I always wanted to be a Della Street to a Perry Mason. And this is the closest I got to it. Ever since I was a child I always wanted to be a secretary. Didn’t know that you could be a distinctive secretary in the area in which you chose. And you find out that by saying you are a legal secretary it has a little more significance than just saying I am a secretary. A medical secretary, theatrical secretary, architect, they all have their special little distinctions. The law is a demanding mistress. And it has been a very, very — what’ll I say interesting but as I also said fulfilling but demanding in the respect that it kept your standards at the best you could make them.*

It turns out that Charlotte’s ultimately coming to Chadbourne was actually her sister Gertrude’s idea;

*My sister fortunately had made an application to Chadbourne & Parke but they didn’t have any openings for her skills. She had a few years of experience in the legal field and they sent her over to Sherman & Sterling and so when I asked her to get me some names through Martindale Hubbell she suggested why don’t I try Chadbourne & Parke. So I did try Chadbourne & Parke and they said they would be interested and I was the*



*first part-time, full-time employee at Chadbourne & Parke. We also had another lovely person by the name of Marianne Titus and she also only worked part-time. The two of us managed to keep things cooking in that steno department and just working part-time two days a week and the dates suggested were Monday and Friday because those were the days after the holiday or the weekend and preceding the weekend and the years went by.*

Right from the bat, Charlotte integrated the Firm’s professionalism and attention to detail with her own:

*Chadbourne has always prided itself on its quality standards. Being a young secretary in a five member law firm and being the only secretary, I had to be accurate in what I did and the way I put it down on paper. That is our stock in trade. So when I came here I just projected what I had done all those previous years and the firm has become so accustomed to looking for that standard of quality that it has been something that we have tried to project and to try and instill in the young people today.*

...

*Don’t ever let me hear somebody say “I don’t care what it looks like”. That is the worst thing in the world you can say to me. The best you can do is right at the first time. And then work on it to upgrade that draft. And then finalize it in a manner that is pleasing to everybody and that it looks like you spent time and effort in what your production should be.*

Edward and Charlotte, who moved to Paramus, N.J., had two children, Edward C. and Carole. Carole later joined her mother at Chadbourne, working at the Firm between 1968 and 1969 while attending school part time.

*I started working at Chadbourne in 1952, still only on a part-time basis. It became more days after that and I had a daughter after that and when she became old enough she came to work with me. And I worked more days of the week with her because I didn’t want her traveling back and forth alone. It evolved into four days a week.*

Charlotte’s stellar performance and professional and supportive attitude were recognized by the Firm from the beginning and throughout her career. As just one example, in a letter to her of December 30, 1963, in addition to advising her of a raise, Director of Administration Edward A. Macy wrote:

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*You might demand double your salary if you could hear all the fine things that I have heard about you from partners, associates, et al. Seriously, your praises have been sung on all sides, and when I brought your name up at the partners' meeting there was a chorus of praise, expressed in terms of the fact that your outstanding ability was fully recognized throughout the firm. The thing that should make you even prouder is that there is such a high regard for your personal qualities.*

*Let me formally express, on behalf of the firm, deep appreciation for contributions — past, present and future.*

It appears that Mr. Macy further reflected his confidence in Charlotte by having her type up his evaluation letter to her. Charlotte, of course, did the job, but also took the opportunity to comment on the situation in a separate letter she attached to it that same day:

*Mr. Macy:*

*Despite your instructions, I found this particular attached letter the most difficult to type. However, by giving it the "cloak of a non-entity" I was able to get through it alright.*

*Needless to say, I appreciate all the kind thoughts. As I mentioned to you, I try to do a job the best way I know how, and if it gives satisfaction, then the purpose for which I am here has thus been accomplished. Every year I have spent at CPW&W have<sup>1</sup> been happy ones for me, and I sincerely hope the future years will prove equally so. I take great pride in being in some way connected with this firm.*

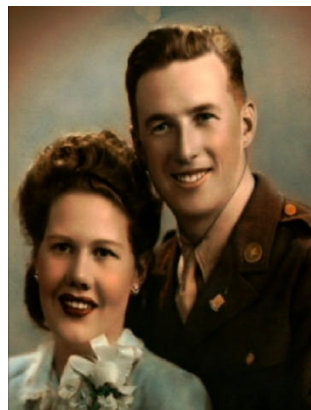
*Again many thanks to everyone, Charlotte D. McNeill*

*P.S. BUT PLEASE, MR. MACY, DON'T EXPECT ME TO TYPE ANY FASTER!*

<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the excitement of the salary increase, the poor illumination characteristic of the time of year, and the cognitive dissonance of a naturally modest person having to type one's own glowing review are among the understandable explanations for this presumably once-in-a-lifetime aberration in compliance with the rules of subject-verb agreement.



*Charlotte (I) at the Firm's 1959 holiday party*



*Charlotte and her husband, Mac*

Similar accolades were reflected in Mr. Macy's evaluation letter (typist unknown) to Charlotte of December 29, 1966, which, in addition to another increase, stated:

*All in the firm hold you in such high regard — both for being the fine person you are, and your many continuing contributions to the work of the firm — that it is really not possible adequately to express this high regard in words. Among your many attributes, mention should be made of the value, to staff members, of your knowledge and good spirits; and the diplomatic way in which you are able to guide and aid in the training of the younger Associates.*

*The firm is proud to have you as an important member of its staff.*

In addition to doing a great job, Charlotte was not reticent, and when she thought it necessary was not reluctant to tell someone for whom she was working — regardless of their status at the Firm — that they were not doing something correctly: "I had 15 years legal before I came here. So I wasn't afraid to speak my mind" — but "always tactfully."

No doubt Charlotte scoffed at a December 15, 1971 printout of her benefits from the Firm's outside pension underwriter, which foolishly asserted, "YOUR NORMAL RETIREMENT DATE IS 05/01/83." Her Chadbourne career plowed straight ahead, and with it a string of well-deserved promotions reflecting recognition of her abilities, efforts and attitude, although each were accepted with humility and appreciation.

*The job had been offered to me, Office Manager, but I did not think I was qualified. I only had two years high school experience. I did not have college education. But then when it finally got to the point when Mac had to retire because of a heart condition and more employment would have been very, very helpful financially. The offer was made again and having a round table meeting with family about not having dinner on time if I took this, the ultimate consensus of opinion was "Mom go for it." So Mom went for it. And I've been here steadily. Five days a week. The older I got the more days I worked but in all truth and honesty they have been the most fulfilling time of my life. I have not regret-* / continued page 4



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*ted one moment of not being able to stay at home and do the gardening or do the coffee klatching with the people. I have thoroughly enjoyed being here with my friends and the support staff we have here is just marvelous.*

Effective November 5, 1973, Charlotte was promoted to Temporary Steno Room Supervisor. On December 24, 1973, she was promoted to Assistant Supervisor of Secretarial Services. In 1987, she was promoted to Steno Supervisor. All along her career, she guided the efforts and careers of others, not only through detailed style guides, memos, and other directives (including in recent years the thoughtful "Charlotte's Web" columns she prepared for the *Firm Forum*), but also and more importantly through individual one-on-one instruction, attention, and feedback.

Charlotte accomplished all these things, and maintained her positive attitude, despite a succession of personal tragedies. On Saturday, September 20, 1969, Charlotte's daughter, Carole, suddenly passed away. She was only 18.

*And then because of the unfortunate incident in my life nobody told me not to come back four days it extended into five and it was the best therapy I ever had or needed when I lost my daughter. So Chadbourne has always been there for me and they have been so supportive and my way of contributing to anything that I could do was the way I did things and the way I cared about the people in the firm.*

On February 22, 1979, Charlotte's husband, Mac, passed away unexpectedly. And in 1991, her son Edward also passed away. Upon each terrible event, the Firm reached out to Charlotte in her time of loss, and Charlotte greatly appreciated the Firm's concern and compassion. In a note following her son's death dated March 4, 1991, Charlotte communicated to the Firm how important Chadbourne's support was to her at that difficult time:

*Until I can personally express my gratitude for the beautiful flowers and for all the kindness shown to me and mine, please convey to all my sincere appreciation, again at a time when caring is so important to me. Knowing that people do care, and somehow share with me another burden, will eventually, I'm sure, lessen the heavy load of that burden. The firm once before was my salvation; the Good Lord willing it will be again.*



*Thinking of you all with deep affection.*

*Always, Charlotte McNeill*

As Charlotte recently reflected, *They have stood by me and supported me in the good days and the bad days and the only way I could reciprocate was by trying to do for them the best I knew how and that came in the training aspects primarily with the young associates and the secretaries. That's my family more or less away from home.*

...

*The firm means very very much to me. By instilling in everybody these standards of quality that we keep talking about is the way I repay them for the way they have been to me all these years. They've stood behind, they've supported me and I've had bad times in my lifetime, as you no doubt know, but they've always been there for me, and they still are, and that's the important thing.*



*Charlotte, who loved to dance, is seen here with NY partner John Nyhan at a holiday party*

And Charlotte returned the favor many times over. When others at the Firm lost loved ones or faced other traumatic adversities in their lives, Charlotte immediately reached out to them and offered genuine concern and heartfelt support, no doubt cultivated through her own experiences.

But she was also the first to celebrate the achievements and successes of others, making clear how happy she was for them. This was most recently brought home to me when after returning from her funeral I went to her office (for the first time in many years, since I always encountered her in the hallways "on patrol" while she was here), and was struck (in addition to the poignancy of her collection of dusty IBM Selectric typing element balls) by what she had affixed to the wall next to her desk — a copy of my and my wife's wedding picture she had downloaded from my website.

Charlotte touched everyone she came into contact with at the Firm, and made a dramatic and powerful impression on them. When I was a Summer Associate here in 1981, Charlotte was one of the people at Chadbourne I had the privilege to work with, and it was primarily because of the spirit, professionalism, dedication, and goodness of people like Charlotte who defined and distinguished the Firm that I decided to come back upon graduation and have remained for my entire

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legal career. Over the years, among the many things that impressed me was, as the Firm embraced evolving technologies, Charlotte not only did her best to adapt to them after decades of succeeding without such resources, but also made it very clear to lawyers and staff alike that such innovations were in no way a substitute for careful and accurate thought and work. In her words, “we strive for the qualities and the standards that we still try to perpetuate throughout the years despite the influx of modernization or computerization.”

*It's what you have up here [in your head], that you put into the computer that's important and not the mere fact that it can do so many different things that are beneficial. It has its benefits, it has its advantages, it also has its drawbacks. I find out people don't have a tendency to be as careful as they might because the corrections are so easy.*

*So the first time around as I say is the most important thing.*

In 1992, as Charlotte approached her 40th anniversary with the Firm, she was given increased responsibility that reflected the core qualities she embodied. An August 13, 1992 Management Committee memo to All Personnel announced:

*The growth of the firm over the past several years has made it more difficult for the firm to maintain a uniform style in the documents we prepare, particularly in litigation. Much effort went into the formulation of the “Chadbourn” style on the premise that all documentation which leaves the office should not only be of high quality, but also look as professional as possible. Additionally, the use of uniform style and format makes revisions of drafts within the office easier, particularly when a number of secretaries or word processors are involved.*

*Effective August 1, 1992, Charlotte McNeill will be responsible for advising all legal and non-legal staff on matters relating to style and format of documentation. As many of you know, Charlotte has been with the firm for almost 40 years and is not only very familiar*



*Celebrating her 80th birthday at the Firm*



*with, but was instrumental in creating, the “Chadbourn” style. In addition, Charlotte will also continue to be responsible for training newly hired secretaries.*

*Please call or visit Charlotte with any questions concerning format or style.*

In 1998, to celebrate Charlotte’s 80th birthday, the Firm prepared a book including cards, letters, and other communications from current personnel and alumni with whom Charlotte had

worked in which they expressed her importance to them and to Chadbourne. In a memo announcing the project, Neil Bianco wrote: “We all know that Charlotte is a great lady and how important she has been to the development of so many of our lawyers and staff. In many ways Charlotte embodies the soul of

Chadbourn.” I recommend that everyone read through that book (which is in the NY library), and its references to Charlotte’s fundamental qualities of commitment to excellence, character, kindness, energy, and wit that we all strive to emulate. Can there be a finer legacy than sentiments such as these samples reflect?

*Your integrity, diligence and selflessness have set a very high standard for everyone around you.*

*Through thick and thin, you just keep on going; you're one tough cookie and I have learned a lot from you.*

*You're a wonderful role model for so many of us! Thanks for all you've taught me over the years.*

*For all the times you worked your “magic” and saved my butt!*

*I know that working with you has made me a better lawyer.*

*You have instilled not only in me but in generations of lawyers growing up at the firm the highest standards of performance through your teaching and your example. Thank you for making Chadbourne a special place.*

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*More importantly, at the most difficult time of my life, you allowed me to take strength from you to carry on and allow my work to provide a distraction for me no matter how rough things become. You were always there for me with your strength and caring and still are. You are one of the most giving, thoughtful, loving and sincere people I have had the pleasure and honor of knowing.*

Charlotte was very moved by this tribute, and following that birthday celebration, she thanked everyone:

*Sincere thanks for making “my day” so special. To say that I was surprised is putting it mildly — I am still on “Cloud Nine.” Trying to find adequate words is difficult indeed — however, STUPENDOUS, AWESOME, OVERWHELMING, INSPIRING, HEART-WARMING do come to mind.*

*Do so appreciate your being there for me. For those of you who were able to attend my wonderful party, I hope you enjoyed the day as much as I did. Yet another page in my “Chadbourn Book of Memories.”*

*Always, Charlotte*

In a further follow-up message she added:

*I look back in time as if it were yesterday when I became Chadbourne’s first-time-ever part-time floater. During those years I have forged many cherished friendships and enduring memories. I do, indeed, count my blessings. Thus, to spell it out even better, I have “borrowed” the following language:*

*“For everything you’ve done . . . For being the special people that you are . . . Thank you so very much.”*

To me, Charlotte’s combination of caring, good humor, and her never-ending crusade to instill proper citation style were encapsulated in a Valentine’s Day 2000 e-mail she sent my wife and me in response to a “change of address” notice we had distributed, styled as a whimsical pleading:

*Dear Larry and Catherine:*

*Loved your Notice of Motion for Change of Venue — especially*

*the jurisdiction. . . . (I thought I was being sued.) Have to make one comment, however. We never abbreviate a case cite U.S. — it is always written out, i.e., United States. Sorry!*

*With best wishes to you both for your continued happiness in your new home.*

*Always, Charlotte*



*Charlotte dancing with Neil Bianco*

Charlotte’s 1952 Chadbourne application relates that her Brooklyn home phone number, in the formatting style of the day, was “Evergreen 8-8169,” and Charlotte truly was “evergreen” in the sense that her boundless energy (as anyone seeing her dancing — an activity she loved all her life — at a holiday party can attest), enthusiasm, and dedication never wavered over the many years of her career. And thus, beyond the many tributes to Charlotte, we can best honor her by continuing our commitment to the fundamental principles by which she worked and lived:

- Treat others with the respect and appreciation they deserve and which you would expect from them
- Do the very best job you can for your clients and for the firm
- Make sure that how you communicate is as polished and accurate as what you communicate, know that others will judge you (sometimes literally) on both, and recognize that the best legal argument can be undermined by a presentation that falls short
- Recognize that rules exist for a reason
- Understand that the quality of the output of technology can be no greater than the quality of your input
- Always be willing to lend a hand to someone who may not be as experienced as you with doing a task
- Be understanding of those who err; do not simply accept it but strive to point them on the proper course
- Never lose your joy of doing a good job, of working with your colleagues, and of helping your clients in need
- And never, ever, lose your sense of humor.

We deeply thank Charlotte for all she gave us for all these many years, and we will always miss her and always think about her. And although she is no longer with us, I have no doubt that, as soon as she entered Heaven, one of her first orders of business was making a bee-line for the late capitalization-challenged poet e.e. cummings, and sitting down with him to deliver a friendly, but firm, lesson on the finer points of proper case utilization. ☺



# Charlotte McNeill

1918-2005

Our mentor and our friend was a generous and loving person.

She will surely be missed.

