As the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries progressed, the individual supervisors faced more demands within their own municipalities in addition to increased activity on the county level. New towns and villages required new roads, civic buildings, and municipal services, while existing communities required extensions of their infrastructure to accommodate growth. Rivalries between towns placed strain on their dual roles as local and county officials over time. Parochial concerns and the relatively even numbers of supervisors over the years produced many instances of stalemate within the collective board of supervisors. As the twentieth century wore on, the need for a county-level executive to provide overall leadership became increasingly clear.

Incorporation of Millbrook Announcement
Courtesy of the Town of Washington/Village of Millbrook Historical Society

Uneven growth patterns throughout the county led some sections of older municipalities to expand faster than others. The resulting demands for greater services and autonomy in these areas led to the creation of new municipalities, which in turn increased the number of supervisors. In 1895, residents of the town of Washington voted to incorporate the Village of Millbrook, an area within the town limits. Residents of Red Hook had followed a similar trajectory a year earlier, forming the village within the town limits.

Stalemate at the 1839 Supervisors’ Meeting
Courtesy of the Dutchess County Clerk

As this page from the 1839 board of supervisors meeting demonstrates, deadlocked votes were a common issue and a major weakness in the board of supervisors system. In this case, the supervisors went through eight tied ballots before selecting a successful candidate for clerk of the board by drawing lots.

Serving a Growing County | The Supervisors in their Communities

J. H. Ketcham, Dover Supervisor
Courtesy of the Town of Dover Historical Society

Born in Dover Plains in 1832, J. H. Ketcham served as the Supervisor of the Town of Dover from 1854-1855. He rose to the New York State Assembly from 1856-1857, then became a New York State Senator from 1860-1861. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he joined the US Army, rising to the rank of Major General. After the war, he returned to politics, serving as a US Congressman.

John Armstrong, Jr., Rhinebeck Supervisor
Courtesy of Winthrop Aldridge, Town of Red Hook Historian

Supervisor John Armstrong, Jr. of Red Hook exemplifies the colorful lives that the county’s leaders led. A native of Pennsylvania, Armstrong served in the Continental Army and the Continental Congress before moving to Rhinebeck in 1789. His subsequent career included terms as a US Senator, Minister to France, and Secretary of War under President James Madison, and a Brigadier General during the War of 1812. In 1840, Armstrong served as the Supervisor of Rhinebeck.

Charles Slocum, Beekman Supervisor
Courtesy of Thom Usher, Town of Beekman Historian

Seen here running for county treasurer in 1907, Charles Slocum had served as the Supervisor of Beekman in 1885. Between his terms in office, he worked as a traveling salesman for Edward M. Depew & Co., wholesale grocers, New York City. He stands in front of a toll booth, a reminder of the strain created by growing transportation demands in the county.

J. H. Ketcham, Dover Supervisor
Courtesy of the Town of Dover Historical Society

Born in Dover Plains in 1832, J. H. Ketcham served as the Supervisor of the Town of Dover from 1854-1855. He rose to the New York State Assembly from 1856-1857, then became a New York State Senator from 1860-1861. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he joined the US Army, rising to the rank of Major General. After the war, he returned to politics, serving as a US Congressman.

Serving a Growing County | The Supervisors in their Communities