

Our City Government

By JAMES H. ROSS

Editor's Note. While occupying the office of mayor, James H. Ross addressed the American Business Club of Lancaster, August 10, 1936, on "Our City Government." Recently the paper was brought to our attention, and the Publication Committee, finding so many interesting facts which should be better known by our citizens, decided that it should appear in our pamphlet.

In speaking about the City Government I felt that I ought to sketch briefly Lancaster from the time that it started. Lancaster was laid out as a town and started on its way in 1729. The same year it was named by John Wright who hailed from Lancaster, England — the city made famous by the part it played in the "Wars of the Roses." And undoubtedly that has to do with Lancaster being known as the "Red Rose City."

In these early days, no doubt, the citizens were working hard to establish homes and build a new city. Lancaster did not receive its charter as a borough until 1742, and this charter was received by James Hamilton, the son of Andrew Hamilton. The Freeholders and the Housekeepers of the said borough assembled at the Court House when by a free vote they elected officers for one year. The officers elected were: Chief Burgess, Burgess, six Assistants, a Town Clerk and a Chief Constable.

It would seem by the above statement that the women had a vote at that early time because they say "Freeholders and Housekeepers." The fact remains, however, that the Freeholders were the men who held land which had been granted to them. The Housekeepers were people who merely had built a house on either public ground or ground already granted to someone else and then lived there; consequently, they were known as housekeepers. They were men and not women that did the voting.

Lancaster was incorporated as a city on March 20, 1818, by an Act of Assembly. Following that Act on May 12, 1818, there was an election held to select by ballot fifteen men as members of the Common Council and nine men to be known as Select Councilmen. According to the records these fifteen persons who were to act as Common Councilmen had to be qualified to serve as members of the House of Representatives, and the nine Select Councilmen to be qualified to serve as Senators of the Commonwealth. Just what that means I am not sure — your guess is as good as mine.

By the Act of Assembly the city was constituted a corporation and body politic by the name and style of "The Mayor, Aldermen and Citizens of Lancaster." The Act declared that this title should have perpetual succession.

It is interesting to note that many of the names of both Common and Select Council are still prominent in Lancaster today. For instance: Reigart, Mosher, Scherer, Musser, Duchman, Eichholtz, Brown, Brungard, Wood, Reynolds, Heitshu, Weaver, Bomberger, Smith, Christ, Hubley, Humes, Coleman, Jenkins, Kirkpatrick, Slaymaker, Steinman, Leman and Dickson.

The first mayor to be chosen was John Passmore. He was elected when Councils met in convention to elect the Mayor, Treasurer, Assessor, Collector

of Taxes, Street Commissioner, principal and two assistant Regulators of Lots and also a Messenger to attend Council. Their term was one year and their salaries were rather meager. For instance, the mayor's salary was \$200, the solicitor's was \$50 and so on down the line. The street commissioner's job seemed more important at that time because he received exactly double the salary of the mayor — \$400. It was the duty of the Councils to enact laws, ordinances, regulations, etc., and see that they were enforced. The Council meetings were then as now open to the public.

John Matthiot seems to have been the first mayor to have died in office. This was in 1842 and he was the last mayor to have been elected by the Select and Common Councils.

Michael Carpenter followed him, taking the oath of office as mayor on February 23, 1843. He was the first mayor to have been elected by the popular vote of the people.

There is a period in Lancaster's history in which there were either no records kept or they have been lost. The period was in the neighborhood of 1818 to 1830.

According to the records in 1843 the mayor's salary had been advanced to \$300 a year, and this was raised in 1847 to \$400, and they furnished him with stationery. One of the functions of the mayor at that time was to hold Police Court. There was a resolution introduced in the Pennsylvania State Senate to abolish the Mayor's Court but Select and Common Councils remonstrated against this resolution because it had been introduced without a petition from the citizens.

In 1878, Mayor McGonigle was continually protesting against the unwarranted expenditures of the City Government and wrote to the members of Councils protesting against the discrepancies between the estimated expenditures and the actual outlay of money. According to the records there was a depression, or at that time a panic, in 1877 and '78. There was a resolution passed through Council to reduce the salaries of the Mayor, Treasurer, Street Commissioner, Supervisor of Water Works and Policemen ten per cent. And ten per cent or any other reduction in that time would mean considerable, because in 1878 the police force, which consisted of nineteen members, were drawing \$40 per month each, with the exception of the captain and he received \$50.

In '79 the Fire Department requested \$3000.00 for fire hose — the records do not say whether they got it or not, but they do inform us that in 1888 they requested a fire engine and they purchased a third-class one for \$4000.

In those days there was not a Board of Health but a Mr. Zahm presented an ordinance entitled: "An Act Establishing A City Physician in and for the City of Lancaster."

Long about this time there was a House Bill No. 16 passed by the Legislature of Pennsylvania making Lancaster a fifth-class City. This was done presumably because in 1874 when the Legislature created third-class cities Lancaster refused to go along. She refused to give up her special charter and adopt one that would make her a third-class City. By so doing they could not add any amendments to their own charter. The mayor in speaking

on the Charter of 1887 said: "The passage of House Bill No. 16 by the Legislature of Pennsylvania and its approval by the Governor work very material changes in our form of municipal administration. Fortunately, for the city's interests and the convenience of its citizens, the features of this proposed legislation most objectionable to Lancaster were stricken out before final passage. But there remains some more salutary provisions and Councils should proceed at once to enact the appropriate ordinances necessary to put them into operation. Under the classification of this Act Lancaster becomes a fifth-class City and will undoubtedly remain as such under the next census."

An Act establishing a physician for Lancaster seemed to take care of things for ten years then it became necessary, or at least desirable, to create a Board of Health. This was done in 1887 — all members to be named by the mayor. It was to consist of five members, each with a term of five years, but to be over-lapping. After the mayor's appointment of the Board of Health he didn't seem to be able to get the desired results — at least he says in his speech to Councils: "The efficiency of the Board of Health as organized depends chiefly upon its executive officer from whom I have meager reports."

In 1893, Lancaster was becoming a more important city and at that time its assessed valuation was fourteen million dollars with a nine-mill tax rate. The people were seemingly anxious to develop, improve and grow. During that same year Council asked the voters to approve a loan of \$300,000 to pave streets.

That same year the Fire Committee reported to Councils that No. 3 House had an injured horse with very bad feet and that he was liable to be ruined at any run.

The mayor's report the next year, 1894, said that the Central Market House was in excellent condition and a model of cleanliness.

They also seemed to have trouble with traffic because they passed an ordinance relating to the riding of bicycles and tricycles after dark and declaring certain practices of wheelman to be a nuisance.

Just a year or so later the mayor recommended that an ordinance be enacted to allow the voters to pass upon the important matter of creating a loan at the next election to be used to procure a pure water supply and to establish a garbage plant. That same year they bought another fire engine.

When we think of the garbage disposal in Lancaster today and realize that in 1896 the Councils accepted the offer of Dr. M. L. Davis to erect and maintain in constant operation, at his own expense, a garbage furnace, we can truly appreciate the generosity of the man.

They were branching out and planning for greater development because in 1897 they created the office of City Engineer with a salary of \$2000.

When we think of the beautiful parks in and around Lancaster and the ones owned by the city we can hardly credit the statement that the city first refused to accept from Mr. H. S. Williamson a free gift of the park known as Williamson's Park. This was done because at that time it was illegal for the city to spend any money on parks outside of the city proper and it was necessary for Councils to appropriate \$1000 per year for the upkeep and maintenance of Williamson's Park. They did accept it, however, six years

later — after the law was amended. The mayor in commenting on this law said that through it we lost the opportunity of buying Wheatland, the home of James Buchanan, at the low price of \$10,000 in 1892. He said that the purchase price was \$25,000 and if the city had bought it Mrs. Harriet Lane Johnston, niece of President Buchanan, was willing to donate \$10,000 and \$5,000 was subscribed by citizens. This could not be done no matter how desirable it appeared to the citizens at that time.

Long Park was willed to the city in 1900 to have and to hold forever. Buchmiller Park was also willed to the city; the same is true of Rodney Park.

In 1898, the first ordinance causing the inspection of milk and the regulation of the sale and distribution of milk was passed.

In 1904, our people felt that they needed filtered water and Councils passed an ordinance authorizing a contract with the Filtration Company to erect and maintain a filter plant.

I find that in 1906 they were still struggling with traffic and there was an ordinance passed entitled: "General Ordinance for the Better Regulation of Streets and Highways." On second reading this was amended to read as follows: "In line 11 after the word 'horses' insert the words 'automobiles and bicycles;' in line 45 after the word 'riding' insert the words 'or running of trolley cars;' in line 48 after the word 'mule' insert the words 'automobile or bicycles'." By the way the speed of automobiles within the city limits at that time was set at not more than ten miles an hour.

Up to 1907 we had gotten along with "Old Glory" but evidently we had begun to feel our importance and the necessity to create possibly a little more patriotism for our own city, consequently we adopted the present municipal flag.

Lancaster City in 1909 had a notice from the State Board of Health demanding that plans for a sewer disposal plant be filed at Harrisburg not later than January 1, 1910. This did not mean that construction must be begun at once, but it did mean that the State Government felt it important to take the contamination out of the streams of Pennsylvania.

According to our records in 1910 a committee was appointed to create an ordinance to eliminate the Smoke Nuisance. So far we do not have the ordinance.

Quoting the late Frank McClain, former mayor, in speaking on our present police station: "Our present police station is a discredit to a municipality of Lancaster's size and importance. As mayor I would be ashamed if police officials of other cities paid us a visit to have them see the manner in which we equip and maintain our police station." This was in 1911. We are still struggling along with the same police station, and I highly recommend a new one thoroughly equipped.

In 1922, an ordinance was adopted for the construction and equipment of a public comfort station and the same is in operation and has been for several years.

In 1924, the "Clark Act" passed by the Pennsylvania Legislature governing cities of the third class caused the mayor to advocate the surrender of Lancaster's special charter in favor of the third-class Cities Commission Form

of Government. He further urged at that time the adoption of a City Planning Commission. The Chamber of Commerce took a referendum on the subject of giving up our special charter and coming in as a Third-class City and the results were 345 in favor and 6 opposed.

After becoming a Third-class City it was necessary to create a budget. The mayor said: "This budget is a radical departure from those presented in the past." And I might add that it is necessary on account of a new state law to set up our budget in an entirely different way from what has been the custom for years.

In 1925, the records show us that the tax rate was lowered to ten mills.

In 1926, our policemen and firemen were placed under civil service, and in 1929 our present ordinance for the inspection of meats was adopted. However, it lay dormant until 1934, when in April of that year it was put into execution, and while it is a big job and requires concentrated effort we feel it very much worth while.

The bond issue of three and a quarter million dollars for the Sewer and Water Improvement was passed in 1931. Work has been going on continuously and is just about completed. The Filter Plant was very much improved and enlarged; the same is true of the pumping stations, and two new disposal plants were built and several miles of new sewers were laid.

During the past two and a half years there has been a considerable amount of work done under CWA, RWD, WPA and other works programs—sewers, streets and an Airport. The Airport, which we are told on good authority, is second to none in the state of Pennsylvania and ranks well with any in the United States, especially when you consider the size of our community.

I have probably dwelt too long on the past and yet I have only touched the historic past of Lancaster. But what I believe you are primarily interested in is the function of City Government today and what the taxpayer gets for his money.

Under the Commission Form of Government for the proper supervision and handling of the various departments and work that constantly goes on, it has been divided between the mayor and the four commissioners.

First, we have the Department of Public Affairs which comes under the supervision of the mayor. It includes the City Solicitor, City Clerk, Bureau of Weights and Measures, Police Department, Board of Health, City Planning and the Shade Tree Commissions.

The Department of Accounts and Finance is under the direction of Commissioner Fred'k John Vaux. It includes the Assessor's Office, City Controller, Treasurer and Bookkeeping Department. Under his supervision and direction is the collection of all moneys and the expenditures of the same. This is a big job and takes lots of time and quite a number of people to carry it through. It includes the Sinking Fund, insurance and taxes, contributions and many smaller details that have to do with the carrying on of the city's business.

The Department of Public Safety under the direction of Commissioner Mylin includes the supervision and direction of the Fire Department and the

Water Department. These two departments call for the outlay of considerable money and both departments are most important when we think of the city's safety and comfort.

The Department of Streets and Public Improvements under the supervision of Commissioner James A. Taylor means the planning, building, maintaining of all streets and highways through and in the city. The laying, construction and repairs of the sewage lines and the supervision and running of the Sewage Disposal Plants.

The Department of Parks and Public Properties, under the supervision of Commissioner Harry J. Stumpf, necessitates close attention in order that the parks may be kept up and maintained in proper condition for the public to use. The buildings such as the Municipal Building, City Hall, markets, etc., must be kept in repair and sound condition for use at all times.

In summing up, I should like to say a word about the multiplicity of things that the taxpayers receive for the money they spend.

There are many services that are rendered that the average public know little or nothing about. For instance there are 357 people diligently, and I believe conscientiously, working for the city all the time in order that these very services may be rendered in an efficient, quiet and orderly manner.

The Police Department carries fifty-four people, who are divided into three shifts and the service is continuous night and day, year in and year out. It is a difficult task to keep the traffic flowing easily. New ways and new methods have to be established in order to keep up with the rapidly growing traffic of not only Lancaster but all cities. The common everyday enforcement of the law and order goes on continuously and while we know the service is not entirely perfect we are striving every minute to make things better for the protection and comfort of the citizens.

Our Fire Department, while it is not busy, thank God, all of the time, must be constantly on the alert and ready for any emergency that may arise.

In order that you may have a full and plentiful supply of pure water, there is a force of people working every minute of the day and night. First the water must be taken out of the Conestoga and pumped into the Filter Plant, then chemically treated and inspected several times a day in order that it may be just right for your use. A trip through this very efficient plant would amaze many people who have not been fortunate enough to see it before.

Then there are the latest approved Sewage Disposal Plants which are in constant operation day and night, purifying the flow that goes into the Conestoga. It is most important that the streams of the state and nation be polluted just as little as possible in order that the citizens everywhere may enjoy and be benefited by these water courses that flow through the land.

Our Board of Health consists of five members who work diligently without pay in order that you may have a healthful city in which to live. There are several paid workers who are constantly on the job at the direction of the Board. Your milk and meat are inspected. The milk is chemically analyzed, the dairies are inspected, and the same is true of the meats. All the animals that are killed for Lancaster's consumption are inspected; all butcher shops,

abattoirs and everything that has to do with the meat supply are carefully inspected and must meet a certain standard. This requires the constant work of three veterinarians, one lay inspector and a secretary who keeps all the data necessary. This same Board of Health supplies a dental clinic at the hospital where school children are treated who are unfortunate enough to have teeth that would not be in proper condition otherwise.

The Street Department is constantly working with a force of men to keep the streets in as good condition as is possible with the money allowed them.

There is a Planning Commission and a Shade Tree Commission both of which are composed of patriotic people who work without expense to the city. They are endeavoring at all times to make the city more beautiful, more convenient and safe.

Our public parks by constant supervision and energetic work are kept in a clean, attractive manner so that our citizens may enjoy them. The public buildings come under the same supervision and they must be kept in repair, ready for the use and benefit of the people at all times.

The department known as Accounts and Finance embraces the collection and the paying out of all money. It is a busy department and must be properly handled at all times.

There is a smaller department or bureau that the average citizen knows little about and many of them do not know it exists at all — that is the Bureau of Weights and Measures which constantly supervises, examines and checks on all scales and measures which are in use in selling food and supplies to the City of Lancaster.

I might say in closing that the citizens in Lancaster pay for all the service that they now enjoy the sum of \$1,088,217.34, and I honestly feel they are getting the greatest value for their money that it is possible to give.