The Political Roots of City Managers in Kansas

by H. Edward Flentje

IN 1917, the Kansas legislature initiated a bold experiment in municipal reform by allowing Kansas cities to adopt the city manager form of government. The new law authorized cities to place the administration of city government in the hands of an appointed manager who was to be chosen solely upon the basis of administrative ability and without any requirement of city residence. The 1917 law envisioned the city manager as a genuine chief executive with statutory powers similar to those constitutionally granted to state governors or the U.S. president. The city manager, for example, was to see that the laws were enforced; hire and fire all department heads; prepare and recommend an annual budget; inform the public as to the financial condition and needs of the city; and make recommendations on all matters concerning the welfare of the city. While many chief executives in U.S. governments would be envious of such powers in their own jurisdictions, a key difference was that the city manager’s tenure of office was in the hands of an elected city governing body. The manager could be removed by a majority of the governing body at a moment’s notice.

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1. Kansas Law, 1917 (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1917), 123-27. In terms of executive authority outlined for the city manager, the 1917 Kansas law followed a national pattern that became a defining standard for an authentic “city manager.” The nomenclature in the Kansas law was somewhat confusing, however, as the terms “commission” and “commissioners” were used to describe the elected governing body and its members. In Kansas, the city manager form became known as the commission-manager plan, while nationally, city manager government was commonly labeled the council-manager form. The commission-manager plan was sometimes confused with the commission form. The latter form of municipal government, often termed the Galveston plan because of its founding location, became popular in the first decade of the 1900s and was authorized for Kansas cities in 1907. The commission form melded executive and legislative authority in the hands of elected commissioners, while the commission-manager plan assigned legislative authority to the elected commission and executive authority to the manager.

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In his message to the 1917 legislative session, Gov. Arthur Capper recommended that cities be authorized to adopt the city manager form of government. By February 16, a city manager bill introduced by Sen. Frank Nightswonger of Wichita had passed both houses with slight amendment; Capper signed the bill the next day. On March 9, after quickly and successfully petitioning for an election, voters in Wichita adopted the city manager form of government. Within the next month primary and general elections were held and five new city commissioners were elected. By June 18, 1917, the first city manager in Kansas officially began work in the city of Wichita. In less than two hundred days, Wichita had junked its existing governmental structure, unceremoniously dumped the incumbent mayor and commissioners, and inaugurated a new regime. A revolution had occurred without firing a shot.

Official public records do not tell the full story of the politicking that brought city manager government to Kansas. Concealed are the campaign tactics, the charges and countercharges, the media barrage, the issues of "good" and "moral" government, the organizational work of groups, and the key leadership of individuals that carried the plan from idea into reality. This article explores the political roots of the city manager law and its initial implementation in Kansas and focuses upon the political forces behind the successful campaign to bring the first city manager to Kansas.

National Context

City manager government was not invented in Kansas but emerged from the forces of change associated with the Progressive Era—rapid urbanization and growing demands for public services, the application of scientific methods to government, and political reforms grounded in business values and progressive ideals. The Progressives advocated reforming the structure of government, and municipal government became the principal laboratory for their ideas.

The first concrete experiment in a city manager form is most often traced to Staunton, Virginia, at the turn of the century a town of ten thousand population with a bicameral, twenty-two-member city council. In 1908, the Staunton council named a "general manager" to "have entire charge and control of all executive work of the city in its various departments." The Staunton experiment was noticed by Richard S. Childs, a relatively obscure political reformer, who in 1910 melded a city manager into the existing, and at the time increasingly popular, commission plan of municipal government to form the "Lockport Plan"—named in recognition of its sponsorship in the New York legislature by the Lockport Board of Trade. While the Lockport Plan did not take hold in Lockport, the concept received favorable press coverage and was disseminated nationwide. In 1912, Sumter, South Carolina, a town similar in size to Staunton, adopted the Lockport Plan and inaugurated the first city manager government in the United States. A critical breakthrough for city manager government occurred one year later when Dayton, Ohio, became the first large city to adopt the manager plan.

Beyond the impact of the concrete experiments in city manager government, a number of national organizations became important vehicles for advocating and disseminating information on the city manager plan. For example, the National Short Ballot Organization, organized in 1909 and headed by Childs, the intellectual father of the city manager plan, actively publicized the Lockport Plan as a model city charter throughout the 1910s. The National Municipal League, a citizens' organization formed in 1894 to fight boss rule and machine politics in city hall, began to look approvingly at the city manager plan in 1918. The league had in 1898 adopted the "strong mayor" form in its Model City Charter and had in 1911 given support to the commission form. In 1915, after some study, the league formally adopted the city manager plan as a part of its Model City Charter and championed the plan in the pages of its journal, the National Municipal Review. Also during this time, the American City Bureau of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce aggressively pushed the city manager plan by providing speakers, advising on city charters, and managing local campaigns for plan adoption.3

Kansas Context

On the surface, Kansas surely did not appear in the early 1900s to be fertile ground for the city manager idea. Authority to install a city manager in Kansas required action by the legislature, for Kansas cities had no independent power to adopt the city manager form prior to the enabling legislation of 1917. Even by 1910 the rural population was more than twice the urban population of Kansas, and the legislature, com-

2. El Dorado voters adopted the city manager plan under the new law on the same day and installed the second city manager in Kansas on July 1, 1917. Wichita operated under mayor-council government from the city's founding in 1872 until 1909 when Wichita electors adopted the commission form.


5. Ibid., 31-32.
posed largely of farmers during this period, was not particularly responsive to municipal concerns or urban problems. Legislative procedure in Kansas laid a minefield for the enactment of innovative concepts, particularly for city government. Those groups satisfied with the status quo for Kansas cities, such as incumbent city officials and their allies, local utilities, and others enriched by existing practices, would have multiple opportunities to defeat legislative action. Anyone seeking reform in the municipal establishment, particularly change which would give an appointed manager far-reaching powers over budgets and appointments that not even the governor of Kansas was granted, would be seriously disadvantaged by the legislative process.

In the face of this inhospitable environment, some of the same forces behind the city manager movement nationally were at work in Kansas. Urbanization was under way, and while Kansas cities were still subordinate to rural interests in terms of numbers, they were growing and in many cases rapidly. In the first decade of 1900, the urban population of Kansas increased forty-nine percent, from 330,000 to 492,000. By 1920, another 125,000 persons had moved into Kansas cities, an increase of twenty-five percent over 1910. During the same period a few Kansas cities, such as Wichita, were growing at twice this statewide rate.6

Evolving ideas for municipal reform at large in the nation, reinforced by urban growth in Kansas, created the context for organizing Kansas cities. In 1909, the University of Kansas hired Richard Price, a school superintendent from Hutchinson, to establish an extension division at the university, and after visiting the newly created municipal reference bureau at the University of Wisconsin, Price set up a similar operation in Lawrence.7 Working in consultation with Price, Charles T. Davidson, William Green, and Frank L. Martin, mayors respectively of Wichita, Topeka, and Hutchinson, joined in a call to all Kansas cities for an organizational meeting in March of 1910. Fifty-two delegates representing thirty-two cities met in Wichita, founded the League of Kansas Municipalities, and elected Price as secretary-treasurer. During its first decade the League was essentially an arm of the Lawrence campus, as the university housed the League offices, provided staff to serve League members, set up a reference library, and later published a League journal. League membership grew from 31 cities in 1910 to 123 cities in 1914.

While the League was in its formative years, the city of Abilene gained some state and even national attention as having a city manager. The Abilene experiment may have been more form than substance, but it did yield the first instance of a Kansas official carrying the label of “city manager.” In June of 1913, as a result of a local political squabble, the Abilene city commission employed Kenyon Riddle, Abilene’s city engineer who had formerly worked for the community on a project-by-project basis, to supervise public works projects and personnel.8 Riddle apparently undertook this managerial assignment with vigor, but eighteen months later Abilene’s fragile arrangement with Riddle was dissolved. Riddle later commented that the commissioners became a little jealous of their

prerogatives and decided the thing should discontinue.9

More important than what Riddle accomplished in Abilene was the publicity he generated for the city manager idea. He was the first Kansas resident to write on the subject, publishing articles in national journals in late 1913 and early 1914.10 He took to the road advocating city manager government in speeches before various groups across Kansas, and these talks often generated local press coverage.11 In December of 1914, Riddle was one of eight people nationally to attend the first annual meeting of the City Managers’ Association, becoming a charter member of the group.12 Riddle may not have been an authentic city manager given the standard definition, but because of his enterprise, Abilene was being recognized beyond its boundaries as a city manager city.13

Riddle’s work in Abilene, although short-lived, caught the attention of the reform-minded elements of the League based largely at the University of Kansas. University staff used the Abilene experiment to publicize the city manager plan. Early in 1914, for example, University of Kansas professor Charles H. Talbot announced from Lawrence that in Abilene “during the first eight months under the commission manager plan there was a savings... of over $1,000... due to careful and efficient planning and supervision of the work by the city manager.”14 Later that year at the annual meeting of the League, Riddle, along with Clarence A. Dykstra, a thirty-one-year-old professor and head of the newly created Department of Political Science at the University of Kansas, appeared prominently on the program to promote city manager government.15 Riddle told delegates of the “success of the commission-manager plan in Abilene,” citing grand total savings of $2,047.34 in sixteen months.16

Dykstra’s argument was more eloquent and incisive:

Although commission government in American cities has been a relative success, proving itself more sensitive to public opinion, more ambitious for the general welfare than orthodox mayor and council plan,... ten years of experience with it have made evident certain weaknesses in the system... It is one thing to represent public opinion. It is quite another to carry out public demands wisely, economically and continuously. ... The commissioner-manager plan, now being tried out in a score of American cities, adds to the conspicuous merits of commission government, adds to the conspicuous merits of modern business organization. Under this system the commission scours the country for the best available man to act as city manager. He is given authority to run the city, to appoint department heads and be responsible for their efficient service, to make out the city budget and overscourt the spending of the money. He is a trained, experienced official who may expect to spend his life in municipal administration.17

Dykstra followed his speech with a carefully written and reasoned case for state legislation authorizing the city manager plan, which was published as the lead article in the second issue of the League’s new journal, Kansas Municipalities.18

The efforts of the state’s municipal reformers, Riddle, Dykstra, and Talbot, succeeded in placing a proposal to authorize the city manager plan on the state’s legislative agenda. The League had formally endorsed enabling legislation for the city manager plan at its annual meeting in October of 1914. This endorsement was limited, however, for issues such as home rule and municipal ownership of local utilities, not city manager government, were clearly the top priorities of the League.19 Once the 1915 legislative

15. Dykstra was at the time serving as Kansas correspondent for the National Municipal Review; he was just beginning a distinguished career as municipal reformer and public servant which included executive secretary of civic associations in Cleveland, Chicago, and Los Angeles (1918-26); commissioner of water in Los Angeles (1926-39); city manager of Cincinnati (1939-57); and president of the University of Wisconsin (1957-5). He also served as president of the International City Managers’ Association (1952) and president of the National Municipal League (1960-61).

16. Lawrence Daily News World, October 9, 1914.

17. Ibid.


session was under way, Riddle persuaded his state senator, Democrat Joseph W. Howe of Abilene, to introduce city manager legislation. Senate Bill 729 was reported favorably by committee but was allowed to languish on the calendar for nearly a month. In the final days of the session the upper chamber passed the measure by a bare constitutional majority, but Senate Bill 729 died shortly thereafter in house committee.

City manager government was an idea whose time had not come—at least to Kansas in early 1915. In explaining the defeat of the city manager bill, Riddle later commented: “I expected to get the support of the League of Kansas Municipalities in this movement, but they [sic] were held off by the municipal organizations and wouldn’t support the idea.” 20 Riddle apparently believed that the local utilities had frustrated legislative action, but in reality the city manager plan had simply not developed a constituency in Kansas. Save for a handful of municipal reformers, no one pushed the idea. Even the support of its prime organizational advocate, the League of Kansas Municipalities, faded during the legislative session.

The death of Senate Bill 729 revealed the split personality of the League in its formative years. The League’s Lawrence contingent harmonized with the national municipal movement and corresponded closely with such groups as the National Short Ballot Organization and the National Municipal League. Its zeal for reform literally jumped from the pages of Kansas Municipalities during the period from 1914 to 1918. On the other hand, the dues-paying member cities of the League were represented by the elected mayors, commissioners, and council members who were products of local politics. They could agree on grand goals such as home rule but were less than enthusiastic about a city manager option that could revise the character of local politics. These constituent members of the League were either unsure of or downright opposed to this plan being pressed upon them by the university-based reformers, and this situation rendered the League politically impotent on city manager legislation in the 1915 session.

**Wichita Context**

While the municipal reformers of Kansas were making their first try for a city manager law, the vagaries of state and local politics were casting another figure to play a lead role in this endeavor. That figure, Henry J. Allen, publisher of the Wichita Beacon, held reform credentials but of a somewhat different stripe. Allen had been active in state Republican politics since the mid-1890s but had gravitated to the progressive camp. In 1912 he had headed a Kansas delegation committed to Theodore Roosevelt at the Republican National Convention and then led the bolt of the Roosevelt faction from the convention to the Progressive party. Along with other Republican newspaper publishers of the progressive strain, such as Emporia’s William Allen White and Wichita’s Victor Murdock, Allen carried the split in Republican ranks back to Kansas and ran for governor in 1914 on the Progressive party ticket, but he was soundly defeated. 21

Allen’s defeat unsettled his political plans, but city politics in the spring of 1915 disturbed them further. 22 A relative newcomer to Wichita, Allen had

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22. The primary sources used for explaining the politics behind the city manager plan in Wichita are the two daily newspapers, the *Wichita Beacon* and the *Wichita Daily Eagle*. 
purchased the *Beacon* in 1907 and moved to Wichita from Ottawa. He landed in the city with a bounce, beginning immediately a crusade to clean up Wichita physically as well as morally. After successfully taking on a number of local projects and causes, his reputation as a crusading journalist bolstered, he gained substantial stature and influence in the community, both for himself and for his paper. In 1911, he secured the city’s printing contract, and as the 1915 city election approached, Allen was hand-in-glove with city hall—supporting on the *Beacon*’s news and editorial pages the incumbent mayor and two city commissioners who were seeking reelection. Following a combative campaign, two of Allen’s three candidates, including the mayor, were unseated. Shortly after the new commission took office, the *Beacon* lost the city printing contract. Allen was no doubt reeling; he had lost a mayor, a commission majority, and a lucrative subsidy.

The doldrums of political defeat brought Allen and city manager government together. The city manager plan needed a genuine Kansas sponsor. Allen’s sagging political fortunes in need of a project for personal political revitalization; he confided as much to his Emporia friend William Allen White: “I don’t seem to have any plans or convictions or movements of any kind in my head,” he noted. “I’m sitting around about as stale and helpless and useless as the Kansas legislature.” This accidental pairing of Allen with the city management idea put both back on the road to success and made sense from a number of angles. First, taking on the city manager project was for Allen good business, a civic cause which could generate local and statewide interest and likely sell newspapers. Second, the city manager plan was good government, as it promoted professional, businesslike government in line with Allen’s progressive reform image and ideals. Finally, and most important, a city manager campaign was good politics for Allen, offering him an immediate political outlet to redress his recent losses and the opportunity to revive his political stock in Wichita and across Kansas. Along the way he just might unseat those who had dislodged him from city hall.

Allen wasted little time. The day after his losses in the city election, the *Beacon* gave the manager idea an editorial boost: “By the city manager plan Wichita could get better business results.” By mid-year Allen had secured a commission from *Collier’s* to visit Dayton and write a piece on how the new manager plan was working there. Allen’s story, “Running a Modern Town,” was enthusiastic: “It is undoubtedly a better system of city government than the Galveston plan or Des Moines plan, or any of the other modifications of the government-by-commission idea. . . . Dayton’s pioneering presages something better.”

Allen next took steps to spark a local movement for the manager plan. In early February of 1916, he spoke privately to the Wichita Rotary Club, an organization of business and professional men, and quietly prodded them into appointing a committee to investigate whether promoting the manager plan “would be a proper club activity.” The Rotary, which had been organized only four years earlier, was looking for a civic project but moved too slowly to suit Allen. By April he grew impatient and gave the Rotarians a public prod from the *Beacon*’s editorial page: “The Rotary Club should not forget what it promised Wichita on the city manager plan. . . . Interested citizens . . . are eager for the Rotary Club to outline its plan of study of the modern form of city government.” By the end of June, Rotary’s investigating committee reported favorably, and “after a spirited debate” the club authorized the committee “to formulate a plan to get the matter before the state legislature.”

While the Rotarians were busy investigating, Allen had also spoken to the Wichita Association of Credit Men, which promptly passed a resolution supporting joint action with the Rotary on the manager plan. With this nucleus of a coalition of leading business and professional men, Allen faced one major hurdle for getting a civic campaign under way: securing the support of the *Beacon*’s arch rival, the *Wichita Daily Eagle*.

The *Eagle* and the *Beacon* were not, of course, natural allies. Indeed, quite the contrary was the case as the *Beacon*, historically the second paper, often took a different view if for no other reason than to sell newspapers and justify its existence. But the situation in 1916 deviated from the norm. First, Allen and Victor Murdock, son of *Eagle* founder Marshall Murdock, had headed the Progressive party ticket in 1914 for governor and U.S. senator, respectively—a campaign which may have brought the two newspapers as close philosophically as they had ever been. Second, the *Eagle* historically had been Wichita’s establishment paper—“the premier publicist for the city.”

however, had tactically preempted the heart of the *Eagle*’s constituency by directly securing the backing of the Rotary and the financial establishment on the city manager issue. Whether by accident or by conscious design, the *Eagle* was enlisted in the civic campaign for the city manager plan. Most likely, Allen’s tactics, buttressed by active recruiting on the part of Rotarians, were instrumental in surmounting this potential obstacle.30 In mid-August of 1916, the *Eagle* began a ten-part series describing the city manager plan as it was being implemented in a number of cities across the country. Before the end of the series, the *Eagle* concluded editorially that “Wichita must have a city manager.”31 When the series was complete, the *Eagle* further editorialized that the manager plan was “the best ever devised” and that it “should be one of the first cares of the next legislature to pass an act permitting Kansas cities to adopt the manager plan.”32

The Civic Campaign

Once Wichita’s two daily newspapers and the heart of Wichita’s establishment had joined in common cause, the civic campaign commenced. The *Beacon* and the *Eagle* became the public organs for the civic campaign, unleashing a barrage beyond any normal expectations of progressive newspapers promoting a progressive cause. In the role of protagonists, both papers used news and editorial columns to publicize

30. Support for the Rotary’s involvement is found in *Round and Round with Wichita Rotarians*. In reviewing a draft of this paper, David Katzman suggested that the concurrence of the two papers on the manager plan may have been another form of competition, a contest for leadership of the movement at the local level.

32. Ibid., August 29 and September 3, 1916.
and advocate the manager alternative, but more importantly, they instigated, mobilized, and publicized in behalf of local groups to generate political support focused initially on state legislative action, next on the local petition drive to put the matter to a vote, and finally on the referendum for the plan in Wichita. In the seven months prior to the referendum, nearly four hundred distinct and substantial announcements, news stories, editorials, editorial cartoons, reprints, endorsements, and other entries appeared in the two papers. As a grand finale of the campaign, over 150 entries were published in the two papers during the last five days before the referendum.

The public message of the civic campaign through the columns of the two daily papers was unabashedly one-sided. Editorialy, both papers were self-righteous in behalf of the city manager plan, enthusiastically outlining its virtues and indignantly panning its critics. Their editorial positions colored news coverage. Feature articles outlining the experiences of those cities operating with city managers were friendly and frequent. Advocates and supportive groups and their meetings received careful announcement and favorable attention. Opposition viewpoints were given short shrift. Over the entire campaign a handful of opposing views saw the light of day in the Eagle; and only one
brief letter questioning the editor's stance appeared in the *Beacon*. The opposition was literally shut out of the daily newspapers in Wichita.

While the *Beacon* and the *Eagle* were harmonious in trumpeting the city manager cause, Allen's *Beacon* played the lead horn. The *Beacon* had surfaced the issue and gave it more space—on both the editorial and the news pages. The *Beacon*'s campaign was more focused and emotional. While the *Eagle* primarily used its editorial columns for advocacy, the *Beacon*'s crusade seeped into every corner of the paper. The *Eagle* pushed other city issues, such as home rule and local control of utilities alongside the manager plan, but the *Beacon* targeted its campaign, first and foremost, on a city manager for Wichita.

Newspaper rhetoric in the civic campaign waxed eloquent, but boiled down to its essentials, the message was Progressive Era doctrine. The city manager plan meant progress, a step forward for the city; it was an improvement over the commission form of government. The supporting logic was simple: separate legislative from executive powers in city government and take politics out of city administration. The city commission should make policy and hire an expert to administer that policy. According to most proponents, this reform was drawn from the world of business run by corporate boards and their chief executives. This business model would centralize executive authority in the hands of a city manager, attract men of executive ability, and allow modern administrative techniques, such as uniform accounting, executive budgeting, and competitive purchasing, to be implemented. A businesslike city government would be more efficient, save money, and bring about good government.

Stories of how the manager plan was working in other U.S. cities formed a large part of the civic campaign. Dominating these stories, however, was Dayton. The attractiveness of the Dayton model created substantial traffic between Dayton and Wichita, as well as other Kansas cities. Following Allen's initial visit for Collier's in 1915, a delegation of Wichita Rotarians made a sidetrip to Dayton en route to their international convention in Ohio in July of 1916. In October, J. M. Switzer, a National Cash Register (NCR) executive and member of the Dayton commission who had literally been loaned to the city manager cause by NCR, made a week-long tour through Kansas with stops in Hutchinson, Topeka, Kansas City, and Parsons in addition to Wichita.33 D. F. Garland, head of public welfare for Dayton, followed Switzer to Wichita in December. Also in December, in response to the clamor for the manager plan being generated in Wichita, Governor Capper dispatched Harold T. Chase, editor of Capper's *Topeka Daily Capital*, to Dayton, the result being two lengthy and detailed feature stories on the Dayton manager plan as the leads for a five-part series on the city manager form.34 Most of these exchanges generated local news stories that were liberally printed and reprinted throughout the state, particularly in Wichita. Finally, in March, a few days before the referendum, one last Daytonian, civic activist Marie Kumer, made the journey to Wichita on behalf of the manager cause. This saturation led one of the plan's principal Wichita antagonists to remark disgustedly in the waning days of the campaign: "Aren't you tired—sick and tired of having Dayton flaunted in your face by a crowd of reformers."35


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**Well, If the City Manager Plan Carries, the Commissioners Can Go Into a More Remunerative Employment**

![Comic strip showing a city manager who is now a movie star, earning more money than the commissioners]

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*Eagle, February 23, 1917*
Dayton composed a good Progressive Era story; and flaunted it was. A flood in 1913 had wreaked destruction on Dayton and nearly incapacitated city hall. In rebuilding after the flood, Dayton reconstructed its government in what would become a classic pattern for city manager government—a five-member commission serving part-time and elected at large on a nonpartisan basis with a city manager appointed by the commission as the chief executive of the city. With a population of 120,000, Dayton became the first major city with a significant industrial base and a broad array of municipal services to implement the city manager plan. Dayton became a national model not only because of its size and classic city manager pattern, but also because of other key features which were useful in selling the manager plan. In the Dayton model, the commission was composed largely of successful businessmen. The city manager and his department heads were experienced, first-class professionals and were well paid for their expertise. During these early years the Dayton manager’s salary ranked as the highest in the nation. The Dayton model also embellished the “business” approach of tough-minded budgeting and modern purchasing in city administration with the human touch, pioneering city services in public health, employment assistance, and cultural activities.

Dayton’s human touch was somewhat glamorized in one story from the Toledo News Bee frequently reprinted under the headline, “Dayton Plan Saves
City Managers

Lives.” The story told how Dayton, under the manager plan, had dealt with the problems of “bad food, poor sanitation, unskilled care of babies, and indifferent medical inspection of school children” and thereby reduced the death rate in Dayton from 15.7 per thousand in 1915 to 12 per thousand in 1915. This improvement was saving Dayton three hundred thousand dollars a year—assuming one human life to be worth one thousand dollars. Dayton City Manager Henry M. Waite boasted: “Let it be said that Dayton is the best city in America for a baby to be born in.”

The Eagle, the Beacon, the Rotarians, and the Dayton imagery composed the mainstays of the civic campaign. They were buttressed by a civic constituency, most middle- and upper-class people—businessmen, professionals, and active women—who were at the forefront of Progressive Era change. These grass-roots reformers may well have carried the day in conceiving city managers for Wichita and for Kansas, but in Wichita conception did not occur through civic politics alone. The civic campaign was ultimately aided by a moral campaign. In Wichita the objective was not only good government but moral government as well.

The Moral Campaign

Moralism has permeated Kansas political culture from the state’s beginnings and has critically shaped certain aspects of Kansas law and government. This feature of Kansas politics was particularly potent during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Writing in 1910, historian Carl L. Becker noted the intolerance of Kansans for moral deviation, observing that Kansans desired to “set their own standards,” “to level all men up.” These “leveling-up” instincts led to numerous moral codes at the state and local level. In 1880, for example, Kansas became the first state in the union to adopt prohibition—a provision of the state constitution which was rescinded until 1918, fifteen years after national prohibition was repealed.

Moralism also shaped Wichita politics. Conflicts over moral issues such as liquor, prostitution, and gambling had roots in the early years of Wichita and had persisted through most of the city’s history. Carry Nation had begun her saloon-smashing crusade in Wichita in 1900, drawing national attention to the open saloons in the city. State officials had intervened to close down “open Wichita” on numerous occasions and with a variety of devices but without lasting success. Assuring strict compliance with the moral codes was difficult for local authorities and made incumbent officials constantly susceptible to the charge of lax law enforcement. Official attention to the moral standards, therefore, swung to and fro with the moral fervor of the community.

The origins of the moral campaign that unfolded in the last half of 1916 cannot be traced precisely. A combination of factors was at play in arousing public attention to the “moral problem.” Although Henry J. Allen’s tracks were less obvious here than in his promotion of the “good government” side of the city manager cause, he was a partner with those fomenting the moral issues. From practical experience, Allen had learned the potency of both moral and civic ideals in Kansas politics. In 1903, he had been the object of allegations of graft in state printing contracts and was later ousted from the state board of charities for this reason. His crusade to clean up Wichita in 1907 and his public conversion by evangelist Billy Sunday in 1911 helped him overcome this past. In pursuing progressive causes Allen had watched the steam come out of the Progressive movement—seeing progressive proposals emasculated in the hands of a standpat legislature, participating in Teddy Roosevelt’s stinging defeat in 1912, and enduring his own losing campaign for governor in 1914. He had discovered the hard way that good government ideas need allies—particularly in Kansas politics.

The civic campaign had produced an alternative for city government in Wichita, but was there a problem? Was there a reason for changing from the present structure? The current regime in city hall had been elected by healthy margins little more than one year earlier. The commission form had been in place only six years. Would Wichita voters now be willing to dump incumbent commissioners and abandon their existing form of government? Would city voters now endorse a governmental structure, completely new and untested in Kansas, based on the promises of a civic campaign? The object of the moral campaign was to convince the electorate that there were indeed problems in city hall, that the need for change was compelling.

The city police department, the largest and most visible element of city hall, was highly politicized and less than perfectly managed prior to 1917. A tradi-
tion of political hiring had been firmly established under the mayor-council government. With few exceptions, each new mayoral administration swept in a new set of police. Friends and associates of the new mayor were hired; officers without political sponsorship were removed. This practice was to have been stopped with the adoption of the commission form in 1909; indeed, a major impetus for changing the form of government then was the political police. The practice of political hiring continued, however. In a remarkably candid newspaper interview, the police chief openly admitted that political loyalty to the mayor was a requirement for service on the force.

By mid-1916 a critical nucleus of people concerned with improving the moral climate in Wichita had determined that Wichita had "not been as open in years." They concluded that moral codes were being violated and that enforcement of these codes by city police was selective. Violators without standing in the community were being harassed, while prominent perpetrators were not interfered with. Patrolmen were ordered to let "joints" and gambling houses alone. Raids were rendered ineffective by tip-offs within the city police department.

Allen's Beacon took these private concerns into the public arena in late August of 1916, unleashing an attack of high emotion: "Even the Blind Can Find Booze!" The news story told of a blind "youth" (twenty-three years old) seen staggering and intoxicated one morning on East Douglas Avenue and continued:

Scores of persons witnessed the spectacle and commented on the condition which the city administration is permitting. The case this morning was but one of many which are observed daily in that part of the city. The open joints, bootleggers, so-called business houses, rooming houses, pool halls and other places which are dispensing the liquor are unmolested by the police who walk their beats in idleness and see nothing and do nothing.

The spectacle of the intoxicated blind youth today was such as to cause a number of persons to telephone the Beacon and ask if there was not some way in which the sale of liquor could be stopped.

Two days later the Beacon followed with another story, "Her Heart Broken by the Joints," about the mother and neighbors of the youth who were distressed over the "evil conditions that the city administration allows to continue." The next day the Beacon editorialized: "We must strike at the system now... to suppress every contrivance for the ruin of youth within our city limits."

Throughout the next month the Beacon attacked the moral problem and city hall inaction with similar emotion and intensity. The Beacon ran stories or editorials virtually every day decrying the lack of effective law enforcement against gambling houses and joints and laying the blame squarely on the mayor and the city police for ignoring the problem and protecting the violators. During the month-long onslaught, Allen's Beacon published more stories on the moral issue than in all of the previous six months.

41. Support for this conclusion can be found in the verbatim transcripts of the investigation of Wichita police conducted by Assistant Attorney General C. W. Trickett in November of 1911. "Before the Attorney General of the State of Kansas..." Transcript of Testimony, Subject File: Prohibition, Wichita Investigation, November 1911, Box 10, Walter Roscoe Stubbs Papers, Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society.


43. Correspondence among the principals indicates that this nucleus included Henry J. Allen, Attorney General S. M. Brewster, Sedgwick County Attorney Ross McCormick, Wichita City Commissioner J.E. Howard, Kansas Temperance Union Superintendent

44. "Joint" was a term commonly used to describe with negative connotation an establishment in which liquor was openly sold.


Two weeks later, Kansas Attorney General S. M. Brewster opened another front of the moral campaign in Wichita. Matching the *Beacon’s* sensationalism, the *Eagle* reported: “Crusading against Booze, a Flying Squadron, secretly organized at a meeting of the Ministerial Alliance several months ago, dropped bombs on the ‘wet places’ in Wichita last night, and began what is believed to be the most far-reaching campaign against the jointist ever instituted in this city.”

The Ministerial Alliance had quietly collected evidence and persuaded Brewster to initiate a raid of Wichita’s joints. The “flying squadron” included assistants to the attorney general, Sedgwick County sheriff’s deputies, members of the Ministerial Alliance, a few college professors from Fairmont College, and the head of the Kansas Temperance Union. The city police were excluded. Within the week the attorney general filed a petition with the Kansas Supreme Court for the ouster of the night captain of the police force, claiming he “knew of violations” of the prohibitory and gambling laws, had “failed to report such violations,” and further had “assisted and given comfort” to the violators.

Two days later the officer resigned.

Within two weeks another moral bombshell was dropped on city hall by traveling evangelist E. J. Bulgin. In the midst of a seven-week, hell-fire-and-brimstone revival mission in Wichita, Bulgin bombarded city hall with the charge of evil booze before an audience estimated at 5,500. “If you can’t stop bootlegging in Wichita it is because the Mayor and others in city offices are a set of liars or are inefficient in office or are in coalition with the business.” The crowd responded with “deafening” applause. “They have sold a boy for a drink of wine and a girl for a harlot,” Bulgin quoted from the Bible. Reeking with sweat, he dramatically climaxed the emotion-packed evening by smashing a chair to symbolize what upright citizens should do to gin mills in Wichita and throughout the nation.

The moral fervor rekindled by Allen’s *Beacon* and buoyed by Attorney General Brewster’s actions and the evangelist’s revivals was channeled into more productive outlets by late November. The churchmen took their moral issues before a local businessmen’s gathering, a luncheon held each weekday at the Forum annex. Cleaning up the conditions in Wichita, they preached to the businessmen, required that attention be focused on city hall. Evangelist Bulgin suggested that Wichita needed “a strong organization that would stand by an administration if it is good and compel it to be good if necessary.”

Mayor Orseus H. Bentley was invited to the luncheon on the next Monday purportedly to present his side of the local moral problem. His defense of Wichita as a clean city was met with hisses and groans from the businessmen and with brutal rebuttal from the churchmen. “The man is a liar who says Wichita is clean.” declared Bulgin. Others joined in to refute the mayor before the three hundred in attendance. In this public confrontation, reported the *Beacon*, the mayor “lost his head” and “shook with suppressed emotion to such an extent that the chair in which he sat collapsed.”

On Tuesday, moral enthusiasm turned to civic solution. An expanded luncheon crowd of five hundred listened to Andrew M. Brodie, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and participant in the attorney general’s raid, say that “the best plan of all” in dealing with the conditions in Wichita “is the city manager plan.” Newspaper editor Allen then took the rostrum to say he was pleased that the mayor “has not fooled the church people.” He further stated that the “prob-

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48. Ibid., October 20, 1916.
50. Ibid., November 22, 1916.
51. Ibid., November 27, 1916.
lems in Wichita will never be settled until we conduct the business of the city in a business way by adopting the city manager form of government.” Bulgin closed the luncheon by urging a city manager for Wichita: “I don’t care what you believe, whether you are a Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Democrat, Republican, or Socialist. Drop all these differences which have no bearing on the situation and get together.”

On Wednesday, four hundred businessmen attending the luncheon formed the Law and Order League and adopted as its slogan: “Make it as hard as possible to do wrong and as easy as possible to do right.” The name and focus of the new league on law enforcement reflected the influence of the moral campaign. Once the traveling evangelist had departed Wichita and public agitation had simmered, however, leaders of the civic campaign met privately and regrouped. In early December, the league’s name was changed to the Greater Wichita Civic League, and adoption of the manager plan was named as its prime goal. Civic and moral forces joined arms for the city manager cause.

The Legislative Campaign

The moral campaign had identified the problem, and the civic campaign had produced the solution. The moral forces, however, had accomplished something even more important to the outcome of the local struggle over the city manager issue; they had completely undermined city hall, as well as any effective opposition to the manager plan. Led by the churchmen, the moral assault had publicly confronted the mayor, questioned his integrity among his peers, and crushed his credibility in the community. With the chief defender of the status quo emasculated, the proponents of the manager cause were not seriously challenged in clearing the legislative hurdles necessary to securing a city manager law.

Leading businessmen moved quickly to take control of the Greater Wichita Civic League and the manager campaign. William M. G. Howse, William C. Coleman, and Austin Stone, all Rotarians and businessmen, served as president, vice-president, and secretary, respectively. Benjamin F. McLean, a prominent banker, and Earl A. Blake, an attorney, served respectively as treasurer and counsel for the Civic League. Shortly after the league was organized, plans were announced to secure enabling legislation early enough in the legislative session so that Wichita could hold a special election for adoption of the plan and then implement the plan with the spring city elections.

Allen’s progressive Republican ally, Governor Capper, helped carry the Wichita campaign for the manager cause statewide. In late November of 1915, Capper announced a “Kansas Better Government Conference” in Topeka, inviting delegates from across the state to promote reforms in state and local government. Charles A. Noll, chairman of the Wichita Rotary investigating committee on the city manager plan, organized a delegation of “representative businessmen” from the Rotary, the Cooperative Club, the Lions Club, the Wichita Club, the Kansas Club, the Commercial Club, and the West Wichita Commercial League to attend. Flawed by the Beacon as “the most significant event in the political history of Kansas has witnessed for many years,” the conference formed the Kansas Better Government League and endorsed legislative authorization of the city manager plan among other governmental reforms. Capper’s paper, the Topeka Daily Capital, began reporting favorably on the workings of the city manager plans in Dayton and Springfield, Ohio, by mid-December. Coincident with Capper’s second inaugural address, the Kansas Better Government League held a second meeting in Topeka where it endorsed among other reforms “an act enabling cities to vote on the adoption of the city manager plan of municipal government.” Allen was elected chairman of the league.

In his legislative message, Capper specifically recommended action on city manager legislation, and on the same day Sen. Frank Nighswonger, who had endorsed the city manager plan earlier in the fall, introduced city manager legislation as Senate Bill 6. Encountering only light opposition, Nighswonger guided the manager bill through the Senate and secured passage on February 1 by a vote of thirty-one to five.

Local utility companies in Wichita, threatened by the prospects of a city manager, reportedly worked to kill the bill in the House, but despite minor opposition, the Nighswonger bill moved steadily through the lower chamber. Floor debate in the House dealt only glancing blows at the issues but did add local color to the final passage of the city manager legislation. Rep. L. D. Moore, Republican of Winfield, somewhat offended that as a “result of pressure from Wichita,” he had received “sixteen letters and one telegram from home” urging support of the city manager bill, salted the subject with a few grains of truth: “This measure is just an attempt on the part of the rascals

52. Ibid., November 28, 1916.
54. Ibid., December 8, 1916.
56. Ibid., January 9, 1917.
that are out in Wichita to turn out the rascals that are in so the rascals that are out can get in. And I don't see why the rest of the state should suffer." Responding in kind, Republican Rep. Robert Stone of Topeka argued the theme that the city manager plan saved lives; under the city manager form, cities were "more healthy for everyone... especially more healthful for the children." The House passed Senate Bill 6 on February 16 by a vote of seventy-six to twenty-four, twenty-five members absent or not voting. Capper signed the bill with little fanfare the next day.

Grass-roots politics in Wichita accomplished in the 1917 legislative session what the municipal reformers could not achieve in 1915. Indeed, the Lawrence-based reformers were noticeably absent from the finale in 1917. At its annual fall meeting in 1916, the League of Kansas Municipalities had failed even to mention the city manager plan in its legislative program. In 1917, political forces emanating from Wichita had immobilized any serious opposition to the manager bill. This coalition for good and moral government, which was guided by Henry Allen, supported by Governor Capper, publicized by the Beacon and the Eagle, assisted by Rotarians both in and out of Wichita, and bolstered by Wichita churchmen, made the final act of placing a city manager law on the books in Kansas a relatively peaceful affair.

Push for Adoption

Even before the final stages of the legislative process had been cleared, an ad hoc group of Rotarians, min-

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57. Ibid., February 16, 1917.
isters, and civic-minded women in Wichita was planning a petition drive to place adoption of the city manager form on the ballot at the earliest possible date. The Wichita Federation of Women's Clubs joined the campaign and offered fifty volunteers to carry petitions. On the day before the legislation passed the House, the Rotary Club announced its willingness to circulate petitions. As Capper was signing the legislation into law, the Beacon reported that "a committee of Wichita businessmen with the assistance of enthusiastic and public spirited women" had printed petitions, organized a drive, and asked ministers to call for solicitors from their pulpits on Sunday.50

On Monday, the civic political machine moved into action. "Practically every member of the Rotary was at work with a petition yesterday," cheered the Eagle.51 Fifty members of the Ministerial Alliance met, endorsed the manager plan, and signed petitions. Federation of Women's Clubs members carried petitions door-to-door. At the end of the day, petition circulators assembled at the Wichita Club to tally the results. They had collected 3,800 valid signatures, 700 more than were necessary, in one day—and within two days after the bill was signed into law. On Tuesday, Civic Leaguers delivered the petitions to the election commissioner, and on Wednesday, a delegation from the Civic League met with the mayor to push for an early election date. Within the week, the mayor ordered a special election be held on March 9, allowing barely enough time for city manager adoption for the upcoming city elections.

Even though the opposition was nearly immobile, leaders of the Civic League conducted a vigorous campaign for adoption as though the election outcome was in doubt. During the final two weeks Housw and Coleman, as well as Allen, served as chief reform spokesmen and promoted the cause before a variety of community gatherings, civic groups, school assemblies, and church meetings. The Civic League opened a headquarters and sponsored a final open meeting to rally public support. Daytonian Kumler made a trip to Wichita and spoke for the manager plan a few days before the election. Late endorsements were secured from the Wichita Equal Suffrage Association and the West Wichita Commercial League. In the final week the Beacon published nearly sixty personal endorsements by local citizens.

The moral pillars supporting the city manager cause shouldered their share of the weight in the adoption campaign. Sheding any pretext of separating church and state, a number of Protestant ministers urged adoption of the city manager plan from their pulpits on the Sunday before the vote. "Twas City Manager Sunday," crowed the Beacon.52 Rev. Brodie of First Presbyterian, Rev. William H. Hommel of Grace Presbyterian, Rev. Walter Priest of Central Church of Christ, Rev. John R. McFadden of First Methodist Episcopal, and Rev. Guy L. Brown of First Baptist all sermonized in behalf of the change. The Congregationalists and the Unitarians opened their churches to discussion and debate on the city manager question but issued no call to the faithful. Not to be outdone by the churchmen, Attorney General Brewster returned to Wichita and launched an investigation of the police department two days before the referendum, and on the day before, he announced ouster proceedings against eight policemen including two police captains, saying that Wichita had a "rotten police force" and that the mayor's "administrative ability is about zero."53

One new wrinkle in the push for adoption was a concerted effort to attract support from among labor-

50. Wichita Beacon, February 17, 1917.
53. Wichita Beacon, March 5, 1917.
VOTE TOMORROW

YOUR OPPORTUNITY HAS COME!

To Eliminate the Abuses in the City Government That You Have Long Complained of, and to Obtain Such a Business Administration as You Have Long Hoped for—You Can Do This by Voting Tomorrow for City Manager Plan

Wichita Is Your Corporation. You Are a Stockholder. Do You Want a Politician or an Expert to Manage Your Business Affairs?

A Few Comparisons and What We May Expect Under the City Manager Plan

**Dayton, Ohio in 1916**
- Paid in taxes $16.33 per thousand valuation and because of the expert management some of the results were as follows:
  - Reduced budget from the previous year $163,600. Notwithstanding this had a surplus at end of first year of $84,000.
  - In 1912, on a larger budget, under the old system, there was a deficit of nearly $75,000.

**Some of the Things Dayton Spends Its Taxes for**
- Street repairing
- Outdoor relief work
- Street washing, sprinkling, garbage
- Pension fund
- The health department employs two doctors and this department last year made 24,000 inspections.
- Dayton policemen receive $190 a month and work eight hours a day.

**The Reason**
Dayton is chosen for this comparison is because Dayton is the pioneer with this city manager plan and has longer experience. FURTHER—Dayton and Springfield are the only large cities in Ohio that have a City Manager Plan and both had a large surplus while others had large deficits ranging from $200,000 for Columbus to $1,200,000 for Cincinnati.

**Wichita in 1916**
- Paid in taxes for all purposes $15.60 per thousand valuation and for what we get there is not one thing to be said in favor of a political management:
  - How much was our budget reduced last year and how much of a surplus was in our treasury after the political managers were thru?

**Wichita Does Not Spend General Tax Money For**
- **Street Repairing**
  - This is done by gams against adjacent property.
- **Outdoor Relief Work**
  - Wichita has no public RELIEF WORK nor playground except those maintained by private subscription.
- **Street Sprinkling**
  - This is paid for by private subscription.
- **Garbage Collecting**
  - This is done by private concerns and dumped where it is a menace to public health and paid for by individuals.
- **Pension Fund**
  - Wichita has none.
- **Wichita Policemen**
  - Receive $175.00 to $204.00 per month and work 12 hours a day.
  - Wichita has not received any one thing from their taxes that Dayton has not received where Dayton citizens enjoy many things we should have.

Your Vote Is Very Important

It is not a choice between friends. It's a choice between systems.

Business or political management, which?

VOTE TOMORROW!!
ing people. Without question, the local movement had had a distinct upper-class bent. Leading business and professional men and select Protestant churchmen had dominated the campaign from the beginning. Dozens of key strategy sessions had been held in the comfortable and exclusive environs of the Kansas Club and the Wichita Club. To redress this bias, at least in part, the Civic League included Al Blase, a local Socialist, and John Crawford, an official in the local Typographical Union, on the program in the league’s final rally. Crawford in particular was recruited to the cause as a symbol of organized labor and was touted by the typesetters as a possible candidate for the new commission. In the final week of the adoption campaign, Civic League spokesmen presented special talks before employees of the Coleman Lamp Company, the Wichita Railroad and Light Company (street railway), and the Jacob Dold Packing Company urging blue-collar support for reform.

Opponents of the manager plan who were willing to go public in the face of the campaign offensive came largely from city hall or a tight political clique allied with city hall and particularly with Mayor Bentley. Four of the five sitting city commissioners openly opposed the plan. Among the city hall allies were a few pillars in the community such as Col. Sam B. Amidon, a prominent attorney; Kos Harris, attorney for the street railway and longtime friend of Bentley; Maj. Park S. Warren, editor of the Wichita weekly, the Democrat; and Albert M. Patten, assistant general manager of the street railway. Warren used his paper to combat the campaign and even appeared before the Rotary Club to present opposing views. Patten lobbied against the manager bill in Topeka. Neither had serious effect.

In the final days of the campaign the opposition made a last-gasp effort, adding some color to the finale. The Democrat issued satirical polemics against the city manager plan and its proponents, headlining the paper’s opposition: “Steam Roller Crushes Rights of the People to Rule.” Three days before the vote, Bentley appealed in desperation to black voters at a gathering in the African Methodist Episcopal Church:

I have it on the best of authority that without exception the men who have been chosen by other cities in this country as city managers, have received their training in the South. What would it mean to the colored people of Wichita to have a Southern trained city manager? How many of you, my friends, would like to see Wichita in the clutches of a Simon Legree?

Amidon played the manager plan with similar demagoguery at an opposition rally held at the Forum on the evening before the referendum:

Aren’t you tired—sick and tired of having Dayton flasked in your face by a crowd of reformers? What can Dayton give us? This much: It can give us 200 open saloons—not another thing. Is that what you want? ... I am not going to endorse this undemocratic, plutocratic form of rule. Are you? ... It’s monarchy, I say, Monarchy! Monarchy! Tyranny!

The victory on March 9 was solid, if not overwhelming—5,908 for adoption of the plan, 8,570 opposed. Half of the city’s registered voters had turned out. The plan carried in all but four of the city’s twenty-six precincts. Those four exceptions included Wichita’s major black neighborhood, a downtown precinct around city hall, the east-side railroad yard district, and one far south-end precinct. The vote in the newly developed College Hill neighborhood led precinct totals with a five-to-one margin in favor of adoption; the Riverside neighborhood north of Thirteenth Street, also a recent addition to the city, followed with a three-to-one margin. The vote within the downtown area was almost evenly split; the outlying residential neighborhoods went for the plan by wide margins. The vote outcome correlated with the social and economic status of the neighborhoods: higher status areas tended to be for and lower status areas tended to be against the plan.

In the exuberance of victory the next morning, the Murdocks’ Eagle used a front-page editorial to boast Wichita as a “Model for the World”:

Wichita did the forward-looking thing yesterday. It decided for scientific government... The very essence of democracy is to reach for that which the world believes unattainable. The aspiration which never ceases to aspire is the very spirit of progress without which democracy would die. Wichita, of all the cities of the Union, is democratic to the core. From the days of the cowboys and the Indians to this present prosperous and metropolitan hour, Wichita has rated men on their worth. There has been no class or clique or set or combination here who dominated. There should be none such and there will not be. The people will take care of that... The next thing in order is the selection of commissioners who in turn choose the manager. They should be representative men, not of

63. As a Republican, Protestant, and Rotarian, Crawford may not have been a typical blue-collar worker. In 1918 he was appointed Kansas labor commissioner by then-Gov. Henry J. Allen.
64. Democrat, Wichita, March 8, 1917.
65. Wichita Beacon, March 8, 1917.
67. El Dorado also adopted the city manager plan on March 9 by a vote of 229 to 137; less than eighteen percent of the eligible voters were reported by the El Dorado Daily Republican, March 10, 1917, to have voted.
68. Wichita Daily Eagle, March 10, 1917.
any one kind or walk in life, but representative of the entire community, men who will place Wichita in first place, above their own or any other interest. That done, Wichita will show the nation a city government that will be a model for the whole world to follow. 69

Implementing the Plan

Once the ballots had been counted, leaders of the manager cause immediately turned their attention to electing a new commission. The day following the election, the Greater Wichita Civic League’s executive committee named a slate-making committee to be headed by President House. The committee was instructed to consult widely with clubs and civic groups in Wichita, for selecting the commission should not be “the province of any single organization” but “should represent as many activities of the city as possible.” 69 The charge to the committee no doubt proved difficult. Working quietly out of public view, the committee ten days later recommended seven candidates for the five open seats. The seven were promptly endorsed by the Civic League and the Beacon.

On March 26, after a subdued election campaign, the committee slate led the primary ticket. On April 3, the Civic League candidates again led the ticket in the same order as they did in the primary election. Elected to the commission were Lewis W. Clapp, president of the First Trust Company; John L. Powell, president of the Johnston and Larimer Dry Goods Wholesale Company; William S. Hadley, president of the Citizens State Bank; Charles M. Jackman, secretary-treasurer (later president) of the Kansas Milling Company; and John H. Crawford, typesetter and member of the Typographical Union. Crawford, aggressively promoted by Allen through the Beacon, gave the commission labor representation and was the only deviation in an otherwise clear pattern of select businessmen for the first city manager commission. Geographically, the new commission had balance: Powell and Jackman were east-side College Hill residents; Clapp, Hadley, and Crawford were from the north side, the west side, and the south side, respectively. Nevertheless, the new commissioners had definite similarities: they were all Rotarians, Protestants, and Republicans. Except for Crawford, they were also associated with the best Wichita clubs (the Wichita Club, the Wichita Country Club, or the Crestview Country Club).

The new commission-elect immediately began meeting daily, preparing to take hold of the reins of power and implement city manager government. On

69. Wichita Beacon, March 10, 1917.

April 12, after being sworn in, the new regime elected Clapp, who received the most votes, as mayor; appointed Edwin T. Batten as interim city manager; and created five new city departments in accordance with the new law. The commission then proceeded to the critical task of hiring a permanent city manager. On May 1, the entire commission began a two-week recruiting trip which took the members to Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri; Springfield, Dayton, and Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit and Jackson, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Twenty-five prospective candidates were interviewed during the tour. Upon returning, the commission named Louis Ash, a consulting engineer from and former city engineer of Kansas City, Missouri, to be Wichita’s first city manager at a salary of ten thousand dollars, effective June 15. 70 The salary, which was

70. On June 22, the El Dorado city commission announced that Bert Wells, city engineer of Wichita for twelve years, had been hired as El Dorado’s first city manager, effective July 1, at a salary of $3,300. El Dorado Daily Republican, June 22, 1917.
near the top in the nation, and twice that of the governor of Kansas, caused some stir. Ash's statement to the local press no doubt pulled at the heartstrings of the Wichita constituents who had fought for the city manager cause:

...I believe in a clean city...I am coming to Wichita to take absolute charge...I will insist on an absolutely clean city...I am a member of the Presbyterian Church and believe in the highest moral standards. I will use every endeavor to establish that standard in the city as fully as possible....I will not let politics enter the city affairs in any way. I am an independent in politics and hold it a first principle of good government that it be non-partisan....I believe that the public is entitled to 100 cents worth of service for every dollar expended. This is the policy that will govern my work in Wichita. 71

Postscript

Since 1917, the city manager experiment has spread throughout Kansas and quietly reshaped the structure and the management of many Kansas cities. Fifty-two Kansas cities, composing forty-two percent of the state's population and fifty-four percent of the population within cities, now function under the city manager form of government. Another thirty-three cities composing thirteen percent of the state's population operate with city administrators, that is, general managers with more limited powers than those granted to city managers. Currently, of the state's thirty-four cities with populations over ten thousand, twenty-six have city managers and six have city administrators. 72

The political career of the manager plan's chief protagonist, Henry J. Allen, blossomed after 1917. In 1918, Allen was named the Republican nominee for governor and won the governorship by 150,000 votes, at that time the largest majority ever received by a Kansas candidate. The extraordinary circumstance of the election was Allen's absence from the state during his nomination and election, as he was on assignment in France during World War I with the Red Cross and later the Young Men's Christian Association. Allen was reelected governor in 1920. In 1929, Gov. Clyde Reed appointed Allen to the U.S. Senate to fill the vacancy left by Charles Curtis' election as vice-president. Allen sought election to the Senate seat in 1930 but was defeated in the general election in large part because of Republican party factionalism. 73

71. This quote is drawn from the accounts in the Wichita Beacon, May 16, 1917, and the Wichita Daily Eagle, May 17, 1917.